DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 064 PS 021 021

AUTHOR	Furstenberg, Frank F., Jr.; And Others
TITLE	Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say about Child Support.
INSTITUTION	Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	AT&T Foundation, New York, NY.; Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.; Department of Labor, Washington, D.C.; Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.; Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	Jul 92
NOTE	97p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, Three Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016 ($8).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; *At Risk Persons; Children; *Child Support; Court Role; Father Attitudes; Government Role; Job Training; Mother Attitudes; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Responsibility; *Parents; *Unemployment
IDENTIFIERS	*Family Support Act 1988; Maryland (Baltimore); Michigan (Grand Rapids); New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This report explores the circumstances and opinions of 71 parents from Baltimore, Maryland), Grand Rapids (Michigan), and New York City who were interviewed as part of a project aimed at increasing the employment opportunities and earnings of disadvantaged fathers, and the amount of the fathers' child support payments. This project, the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS), uses a combination of job training, personal support, and incentives to provide opportunities for out-of-work fathers whose children receive public assistance to better fulfill their parental roles, especially their role as provider. The PFS project grew out of a provision of the Family Support Act of 1988, which authorized a small-scale effort to help noncustodial parents who are unable to pay child support because they are unemployed. The overall purpose of the interviews of parents was to learn what noncustodial parents think about their roles and responsibilities, and about the public institutions that enforce child support obligations. The document has three main sections which report on the interviews in the three cities. Each section includes an explanation of the interview methodology, excerpts from the interviews, and a discussion of the implications of the parents' attitudes for PFS. An appendix provides a brief explanation of the background and goals of the PFS project. (MDM)

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CARING and PAYING:

What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support

Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr.
Kay E. Sherwood
Mercer L. Sullivan

Manpower
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July 1992

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Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

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MDRC's development, production, and distribution of this report have been supported by the funders of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration:

The Pew Charitable Trusts
The Ford Foundation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Labor
AT&T Foundation

Dissemination of this report is also supported by MDRC's Public Policy Outreach funders:

The Ford Foundation
The Ambrose Monell Foundation
Alcoa Foundation
Exxon Corporation
Ætna Foundation
The Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders or the participating states. Interested readers may wish to contact the states listed in the appendix of this report for more information on the program.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Furstenberg, Frank F.
Caring and paying: what fathers and mothers say about child support / Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Kay E. Sherwood, Mercer L. Sullivan.
p. cm.
1. Child support–United States. 2. Aid to Families with Dependent Children programs–United States. 3. Poor children–United States. I. Sherwood, Kay E. II. Sullivan, Mercer L. III. Title.
HV741.F87 1992
362.7'1–dc20
92-17616
CIP

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Preface

This is the first report of a unique demonstration project aimed at improving the resources available to poor children. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS), authorized by the Family Support Act of 1988, represents a promising approach to reducing poverty among children in families receiving welfare through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. At a time when the contributions of two wage-earners are increasingly necessary to provide a decent standard of living for families, Parents' Fair Share targets the "other half" of the parental earning capacity in AFDC households—the noncustodial parents, usually fathers. The goal of Parents' Fair Share is to boost the income potential of welfare families by increasing the earnings of noncustodial parents and ensuring that those earnings are converted into regular child support payments.

There are many unanswered questions about child support: who pays and who does not; the extent to which joblessness and unstable work patterns are barriers to regular child support; why some noncustodial parents with good intentions do not pay; what public policies and programs might induce more noncustodial parents to assume responsibility for their children's financial support. Parents' Fair Share is designed to expand our knowledge in these areas, as well as to learn whether its particular combination of services and incentives makes a difference for poor children. This report lays a foundation for that knowledge. The opinions expressed by the parents who participated in these interviews, and the circumstances of their lives, helped inform the early stages of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration and bring to life the challenges ahead.

Judith M. Gueron
President

Acknowledgments

The authors are indebted to a number of people who helped arrange and conduct the interviews that make up this report. In New York City, Richard Curtis and Donnie Thompson helped recruit participants for the Queens and Brownsville focus groups, respectively, which were conducted by Mercer L. Sullivan, a Senior Research Associate at the Community Development Research Center of the New School for Social Research in New York City and author of the section of the report entitled "Noncustodial Fathers' Attitudes and Behaviors."

Terry Williams, Associate Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research, also made significant contributions to the New York City portion of the report. He recruited the participants and conducted the focus group interviews in Harlem, analyzed the results, and shared his expertise in using this method of data-gathering.

Alisa Belzer assisted in conducting the Baltimore interview with young mothers, which was led by Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., author of the section entitled "Daddies and Fathers: Men Who Do for Their Children and Men Who Don't" and the Zellerbach Family Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania.

In Grand Rapids, William Camden, Kent County Friend of the Court, and Tom Spaak and Sis Warner at the Wyoming Community Education Program, arranged for the interviews conducted by Fred Doolittle and written about by Kay Sherwood, who is Director of Special Projects at MDRC; she authored the section called "Child Support Obligations: What Fathers Say About Paying," as well as the report's Introduction and Conclusion.

At MDRC, Gordon Berlin played a major role in the development and completion of the report. He conceived the project, brought the authors together, and provided consistently helpful suggestions from the earliest stages to the final manuscript. Judith Gueron, Rob Ivry, Fred Doolittle, and Milton Little also offered insightful comments.

Also essential to this examination of parents' views was the support provided by the partners in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration; they include the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the AT&T Foundation.

The authors appreciate, above all, the candor and cooperation of the 71 parents who participated in the interviews. Without them, we would understand much less. We hope that the report gives readers a sense of the parents' lives, which we were privileged to enter, however briefly. We also hope that their struggles and accomplishments provide clues to how public policy and programs can improve conditions for poor families.

I. Introduction

This report explores the circumstances and opinions of 71 parents who were interviewed to help inform a project aimed at increasing the employment and earnings of disadvantaged fathers, and child support payments made by them. That project, the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS), tackles a social problem that is crucially linked to child poverty in the United States: the failure of noncustodial parents—most of whom are fathers—to contribute financially to their cnildren's support. Through a unique combination of job training, personal support, and incentives, Parents' Fair Share will provide an opportunity for out-of-work fathers whose children receive public assistance to better fulfill their parental roles, especially as providers. The project will encourage them to establish legal paternity, if they have not done so, and to make regular payments through the formal child support system, in exchange for help in finding jobs and increasing their earning power.

The Problem: Child Poverty

In every state and locality, noncustodial parents have the legal obligation to contribute to the financial support of their children. When they contribute too little, sporadically, or not at all, there is a "safety net" of government cash assistance, most often the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Yet one out of five children in the United States is poor. Children living with single mothers are particularly vulnerable: 51 percent of all children in female-headed households, and more than two-thirds of children under age six living in such households, are poor.[1] The probability that, sometime before age eighteen, an American child born in 1980 would live in a household receiving welfare was almost one in three.[2]

In one sense, child poverty is a simple phenomenon. Usually children are poor because their *parents* are poor—most often because one or both parents work at low-wage or part-time jobs, or are unemployed or disabled. Some children are poor because their parents have separated or divorced or were never married and the noncustodial parent who is not living with them (usually the father) is not contributing financially to his family. With one divorce for every two marriages and an out-of-wedlock birth rate of 25 percent, it is not surprising that female-headed families with children make up the largest group living in poverty in the United States.[3]

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[1] C. M. Johnson et al., *Child Poverty in America* (Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund, 1991).

[2] D. P. Moynihan, "Social Justice in the *Next* Century," *America* 165 (September 14, 1991).

[3] National Center for Health Statistics, *Monthly Vital Statistics Report* 40, no. 12 (1992); Johnson et al., *Child Poverty*; and Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, *1991 Green Book: Overview of Entitlement Programs*, Background Material and Data on Programs Within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 1146, Table 11.

In another sense, child poverty is extraordinarily complex. It raises a host of questions about society's expectations of parents, parents' motivations to work and to support their children, and the methods available to encourage and enforce expectations of parental responsibility. Child poverty is often enmeshed in unsuccessful relationships between men and women. Child poverty also reflects the failure of our educational institutions to equip some people for work, as well as obstacles in the job market for people who want to work. It mirrors and magnifies other social problems, including racial discrimination and gender bias; it points up the poor performance of many public agencies charged with establishing and enforcing legal child support obligations; and it reveals the difficulty of striking a balance between twin social goals—providing adequate income for poor families who are incapable of supporting their children while still encouraging work and discouraging dependence on public assistance.

Creating and implementing simple, fair, and effective procedures to establish paternity and child support obligations has proven to be a challenge in many localities. Nationally, legal paternity is established for fewer than half of the children born to never-married parents in child support cases.[4] Ten million women age 15 or older have children who are theoretically eligible to receive financial support from an absent parent; yet child support awards have been made in only 58 percent of such cases.[5] Even more difficult is the task of collecting money from noncustodial parents. In 1989, only about half of the women who were owed child support received the full amounts due them. Payments are even less likely by noncustodial parents of welfare families, whose child support rights are signed over to the welfare agency, although they receive the first $50 paid by noncustodial parents as an incentive to cooperate in locating absent fathers.[6] Only about 16 percent of these families also received such child support incentive payments in 1990.

A Response: Combining Opportunities to Work with Child Support Obligations

The Family Support Act of 1988 mandated both a new employment and job training program for welfare recipients, called the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, and stronger state child support enforcement programs. The act also authorized a small-scale effort to help noncustodial parents who are unable to pay child support because they are unemployed. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration grew out of this provision of the law. While the core idea was to allow unemployed fathers in selected states access to the types of education and job training services offered through the JOBS program to AFDC recipients—mostly mothers—a program model was needed that would respond to the circumstances of the men targeted.

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[4] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, *Child Support Enforcement: Fifteenth Annual Report to Congress, For the Period Ending September 30, 1990* (Washington, D.C.: National Child Support Enforcement Reference Center, n.d.), pp. 15-16.

[5] G. H. Lester, *Child Support and Alimony: 1989*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Consumer Income, Series P-60, no. 173 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1991).

[6] Committee on Ways and Means, *1991 Green Book*.

The reasons for nonpayment of child support are not well understood, and the responses of poor parents to new services and incentives could only be speculated upon when MDRC began developing Parents' Fair Share. Thus, in late 1990, a series of focus group interviews was begun with low-income fathers not living with their children, and with poor mothers, to learn more about how Parents' Fair Share should be designed. Key questions included: What do poor noncustodial parents say about their willingness to work and pay child support? Would they be likely to participate in job training programs on the condition that they cooperate with the formal child support system? What inducements are likely to be effective in gaining the cooperation of the custodial, as well as the noncustodial, parents of children receiving welfare?

The people whose voices are heard in this report were interviewed at different stages of Parents' Fair Share's design and implementation. Early on, in the 1990 interviews, the main purpose was to learn more than the research literature provided about poor fathers and mothers living apart and to help shape the demonstration components. In the later (1991 and 1992) interviews, the objectives shifted slightly: The interviewers sought to confirm and extend what was learned from the early interviews, especially to make sure that the demonstration approach made sense for a wide range of families with children receiving welfare, and to help set expectations for Parents' Fair Share.

These interviews were one of many sources of information that shaped the Parents' Fair Share model, which will be pilot-tested during 1992 and 1993. From family court judges, child support enforcement officials, researchers who study disadvantaged men and family formation and dissolution, administrators of programs providing employment services to disadvantaged men, advocates for women's and children's rights, and from the handful of people across the country who have designed and implemented employment programs for noncustodial parents, MDRC gathered impressions, opinions, and data to determine the optimum mix of opportunity and obligation in Parents' Fair Share and to specify the elements of the program. A model consisting of four components emerged: (1) occupational training and job search/placement services, emphasizing on-the-job (OJT) instead of classroom-based approaches; (2) enhanced child support enforcement using a variety of incentives to reward the efforts of noncustodial parents who participate and to increase the chances that uncooperative parents will be penalized; (3) peer support and parenting instruction for fathers to guide and reinforce positive parental behaviors; and (4) mediation services to help fathers and mothers work out disagreements that could interfere with regular payment of child support. (A fuller description of Parents' Fair Share is included at the end of this report.)

The stories of men and women who resemble those targeted by Parents' Fair Share form a clear and compelling point of departure for the demonstration. While there is a wide disparity of circumstances among the 71 individuals interviewed, what they have to say illustrates the potential for improving the existing child support system by offering new services and incentives. As the statistics cited above suggest, the public institutions responsible for establishing parental obligations and ensuring child support could be much more effective, and the interviews give hints of what would make the system fairer, more consistent, and more even-handed in the eyes of poor parents. The interviews also suggest the possible limits of the formal child support system. According to the fathers and mothers interviewed, that system is not the only barrier–or even the most prominent barrier–to financial contributions by noncustodial parents. They describe fundamental tensions between men and women that get in the way, beliefs about parental responsibility that are less absolute and more circumstantial than child support laws usually accommodate, and some acceptance of welfare as a substitute for parental support. There are also serious job handicaps, economic dislocation, and chaotic lives described here, as well as simple resistance to social controls.

Because of the way they were recruited for the focus groups, the people whose views are described in this report are not necessarily representative of parents who will make up the target group for Parents' Fair Share–noncustodial parents of children receiving public assistance and, for some services, the children's custodial parents. Furthermore, the authors can verify few of the details of the parents' circumstances, and they acknowledge possible exaggerations. Taken together, however, the opinions and experiences of these 71 parents provide a rich context for understanding how a program like Parents' Fair Share might affect their behavior. Without making excuses for the noncustodial parents who do not live up to their obligations for child support, this report attempts to get behind the alarming statistics and present the perspectives of the parents themselves. Ultimately, what parents in similar situations believe, and how they behave in response to the offer of employment services, will determine the success of Parents' Fair Share.

The Structure of the Report

This document has three main sections, each reporting on interviews conducted by different researchers in different cities. These are followed by a concluding discussion about the implications of the parents' attitudes and perceptions for Parents' Fair Share and for public policy in general. Descriptions of the interview locations, methods for identifying the parents, and other pertinent methodological information are provided at the beginning of each of the three main sections. The overall purpose of the interviews was similar: to learn what noncustodial parents–who are most often fathers–think about their roles and responsibilities, and about the public institutions that enforce child support obligations. One author, Frank Furstenberg, also set out to learn how custodial parents–mothers, in his interview group–think about the same issues and how they react to the opinions and behaviors of their children's fathers.

Because Parents' Fair Share is targeted to the noncustodial, unemployed parents of children receiving welfare, it was important to interview parents who would be similarly disadvantaged. Thus, most of the people whose words and views are reported here are poor; many of the fathers are unemployed or have been unemployed in the past, and many of the mothers are receiving welfare or have received it in the past. Also, almost all of the fathers are living apart from one or more of their children.

Child support is not just a problem of the poor, however. Middle-class parents end up in the child support system, too, and people with more than enough money to meet their child support obligations frequently fail to pay, sometimes causing their families to resort to public assistance. Parents' Fair Share programs will uncover such cases. To learn more about how the child support system works for fathers, regardless of their employment status and payment records, one of the groups interviewed for this report was drawn from a fathers' rights organization; employed, middle-class fathers predominated in this interview group.

There are major differences among child support programs in Baltimore, Maryland, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and New York City, where the interviews took place, including the extent to which the programs work with non-welfare populations, the probability that parents who do not pay will go to jail, and the laws governing local child support practices. These differences might be expected to shape the experiences and opinions of the parents who participated in the discussions summarized here.

However, across the interview locations, the fathers who talked about the public agencies that enforce child support obligations were consistently negative, although they did not oppose supporting their children in principle. But many of the fathers, and the mothers interviewed by Frank Furstenberg, were often mistaken about the child support procedures that affected them. The authors of the three main sections of the report do not go into much detail about how the child support system works in the interview locales. Nor do they always explain whether the beliefs the parents have about how the system works are justified. The *perceptions* parents have of the child support enforcement system—formed by their direct experiences, by "word of mouth" reports, and by community-wide values—may matter as much to their behavior as the legal foundations of the system or the actual operation of the public agencies charged with carrying out child support laws.

II. Noncustodial Fathers' Attitudes and Behaviors

Mercer L. Sullivan

This section of the report is based on focus group interviews conducted with a total of 42 noncustodial fathers in New York City by Mercer Sullivan and Terry Williams. Three of the groups, interviewed in August 1990, were made up of residents of predominantly low-income neighborhoods of New York City. Most of the men had low levels of education and many had persistent employment problems. Many were the fathers of children receiving AFDC and all were African-American adults. The 17 members of two groups organized by Terry Williams were residents of Harlem and ranged in age from 19 to 39. Most were in their mid-twenties to early thirties. The 14 members of a group organized by Mercer Sullivan were residents of Brownsville (in the borough of Brooklyn) and had a similar age distribution. Several of the participants in these groups had more than one child, often by different mothers. The Brownsville group included some steadily employed men along with others who were unemployed, some on a long-term basis and others temporarily. In the Harlem group, fewer men seemed to be steadily employed and some openly claimed to have illegal incomes.

A fourth focus group interview was conducted by Mercer Sullivan with 11 white noncustodial fathers in February 1992, and was supplemented by brief individual telephone interviews with the participants. Most of these men were from the borough of Queens. None were college-educated and all had low to moderate incomes. Several were recruited through a research center in Brooklyn, near the Queens border, that offers free testing for HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the virus that causes AIDS. Many of the men who come in for these tests are current or former users of intravenous (IV) drugs. However, to broaden the focus group membership, several men who were neither current nor former IV drug users were recruited through those originally contacted at the research center. Of the 11 participants, 5 were receiving methadone treatment. The other 6 were neither methadone nor IV drug users, although some had at one time in their lives abused drugs or alcohol. The men ranged in age from 23 to 49. They were all noncustodial fathers, and their children ranged in age from 2 to 24.

The questions asked in all four New York City focus groups concerned the fathers' relationships with their children and with the mothers of their children, their own personal histories (especially their work histories), and their knowledge of and contact with the child support enforcement system.

The following discussion of the fathers' attitudes and behaviors is divided into two parts. The first reports on the interviews with the Harlem and Brownsville men, all African-Americans. The second reports on the white men from Queens. While the employment experiences of the two populations differ—with more job-holding among the white men—their views of fatherhood and child support are similar.

The Harlem and Brownsville Groups

Family Responsibilities

Contrary to prevailing stereotypes, the men in these focus groups expressed powerful feelings about men's responsibilities toward their families. These expressions came both in response to direct questions—such as "What does it mean to be a father?"—and spontaneously in the course of discussions of more specific topics, such as how many children they had and where they lived. It was quite apparent that the men's emotional lives were intensely bound up both with their children and with other family and household relations, including their own families of origin and other children with whose mothers they maintained relationships. Such expressions of paternal feeling as "I love them" and "that's your blood" recur throughout the focus group transcripts. One participant spoke of his feelings on the birth of his child: "I was proud to be a father, I was really excited and I said . . . God bless the little kid."

Some of the men seemed to be explicitly addressing a perceived stereotype of African-American men as lacking in paternal feeling. One said: "Black men today do not like to lose their children." Another said: "A black man is supposed to support his black kids . . . you are supposed to take care of that because that's yours."

These same men, however, also acknowledged freely that they and other men in their communities, including their own fathers, were often separated from their children. One said:

> Whether I'm with the woman or not, that's mine and I'm gonna take care of mine because I didn't like the way mines did us.

Another, asked to rate the importance of a man's taking care of his children, on a scale of 1 to 10, said: "I say the full 10 because it don't go that way but that's the way it's supposed to be." Another expressed his own sorrow at separation: "I love my children very much. I miss them now. Sorry me and their mother couldn't get along." Many see their children frequently. Others do not. One was a primary caretaker of one child and a noncustodial parent of another. Some are primary caretakers for days and weeks at a time.

The men had lived all their lives in communities where fathers are often separated from their children, which seems to color their views of family responsibilities. Discord in their romantic relationships with the mothers of their children (most were not married) and, for some, involvement with drugs, crime, and incarceration also affected their views. A number of their stories and discussions illustrate these themes.

For example, some of their feelings of manhood and attempts to support their children appeared to be closely tied to their own experiences of having grown up separated from their fathers. One spoke of "knowing that yours didn't do right by you, so, if you make a family, you gonna want to do right." Another said: "I don't know my pops, so I always wanted my son to be with his, to know his father." Another focus group member expressed the relationship between child support and manhood directly: "A dog can make a baby. A man can take care of it."

Several of the men were in complicated family situations in which they felt responsibility to multiple households, not just those in which their own biological children resided. Some lived with their own families of origin and said things such as: "I'm staying with family and I got to pay rent there." One man said that when he received his meager paycheck, he first gave some to his mother, with whom he resided. He explained: "I hit Mama first, you know how them elderlies are, living on SSI [Supplemental Security Income] type of thing." Others said they lived with women who had children by other men and made their first contributions to those households.

Complicated family situations were also reflected in conversations about sexual and romantic relationships. One topic discussed at length in one group was whether having more than one woman increased one's feeling of manhood. Another reason for their multiple relationships with women emerged when they talked about their difficulties in attracting and staying attractive to women. In both groups, some men talked about how interested women are in money and how a man without money cannot attract them:

> They are greedy, man.
>
> If you don't got money, they don't want to deal with you.
>
> If they see you with gold, they want to deal with you. Then, if you don't have it on, some girls don't want to talk to you. It depends on the way you dress.

Another man, who is married, said that not being able to find work made him not want to go home and face his wife and children. He concluded that it was easier to have a brief fling with someone new, because that only required "a little money in your pocket" at the time, not a steady income. He said: "On the outside, you can maintain an image; inside, nothing there."

One of the most common reservations expressed about making child support contributions concerned situations in which the mothers of their children were living with other men. Such circumstances appear to have powerful inhibiting effects on their desire to make contributions to their own children. One said:

> [A man] feels he may not be supporting the children alone but the mother and the next man. That is why the man is holding back the money.

Others said: "You are worried about the next man" and "Another man might be there to take care of your child and getting the money."

Feelings that a biological father's support obligations are attenuated when the mother is living with another man may be fairly common among noncustodial fathers in all walks of life. Such feelings may be even stronger in poor New York City communities such as Harlem and Brownsville, however, where marriage rates are low, households split and re-form frequently, and poverty enforces a day-to-day coping attitude toward survival. Some men's concerns about where their money was going had to do with fears that the mothers were spending the money on drugs. Several men had faced this problem, with different results. One man said the mother's drug use had caused him to discontinue payments:

> She's on crack right now . . . the money I used to give her to get some Pampers and stuff and I'd come back a little later on, no Pampers, she's not there and what not. That's basically what made me stop going around there, you know.

Another encountered a similar situation and reacted differently. He called a city agency and initiated proceedings to have four children, three of them his, taken out of the mother's custody. Because he was not employed at the time, the children were placed in foster care. He later gained custody of one of his children. At the time of the focus group interview, he was still trying to get custody of his two other children as well as another child of the same mother by a different man. Another focus group participant also had custody of his child as a result of the mother's drug problems. This man also had another child, by a different woman, who lived with the mother's mother. In both these cases, the men had previously been absent fathers making irregular contributions but had obtained direct custody when the mothers' drug problems grew more severe.

When asked whether they thought women should be primarily responsible for taking care of children, focus group participants generally disagreed and said that it should be 50-50. Although they were all separated from at least one of their children, several reported providing substantial direct care for their children. One man was providing child care while the mother worked. Others spoke with feeling of their enjoyment of children, including taking care of them.

When asked what a father's responsibilities to his children should be, several stressed that money was not the main thing and was in fact less important than spending time with them and teaching them proper behavior. One man explained: "It takes time more than money. I have time to take with that. That compensates more than money." Outside observations confirmed that this man did in fact spend a lot of time with his children. He had also been making regular contributions until a recent job loss. Other men were quick to support his point of view, with several stressing teaching, instilling respect, and religion as areas of paternal responsibility that are as important as financial support.

The values expressed about fathers' responsibilities were far more uniform than the men's behavior, by their own assessments and by outside confirmation in some cases, although gauging their actual contributions requires some caution. When first asked, most claimed that they were making payments. Upon closer questioning, it appeared that many of these initial claims were exaggerated. (Additional information was available for the Brownsville group because the person who had recruited the participants knew most of them personally.) The exaggerated claims about payments for child support were generally associated with exaggerated claims about income. Most of those in the Brownsville group reported some form of employment, but in many cases they were talking about jobs they no longer held. Many of these men were unemployed or sporadically employed. Some members of the Harlem groups reported regular income from the underground economy (referred to as "hustling" or "scrambling"), but under closer questioning and the scrutiny of their peers, they appeared to be not very successful in illegitimate endeavors either.

In fact, even the men's own reports of their contributions for their children contain many qualifiers, such as "when I can." When pressed, most of those with children by more than one mother admitted to contributing more to some children than to others. In some cases, this was because legal paternity and child support had been established for one child but not for others. More often, it resulted from the fact that there was a closer relationship with one mother than the other(s), either romantically or on the basis of friendship and trust:

> I don't see the first one because he is with his mother. She got married to some other guy and they want to keep me out. The other one, I always see him all the time. I buy him things.
>
> Whatever I can make I try and send to them, especially my daughter's mother because my son's mother is remarried.
>
> If I am not in the best of moods with their mothers, it does have an effect.

Some men also admitted fluctuations in support over time, related to their own shifting income levels and the demands of the courts, as well as to the ages of the children, the state of their relationships with the mothers, and the extent of their direct contact with the children. Some had been involved in court cases over support payments and visitation rights, though most had dealt with these disputes outside the legal system. Only one man reported having been legally denied visitation. He was bitter that his inability to earn a decent living had cut him off from his son:

> She won't let me see him, won't open the door. Maybe when he gets older, he will want to see me. Maybe if I get a good job, some sense will get into her. Maybe the courts will let him see me.

Making and Having Money

The focus group participants from Harlem and Brownsville had quite limited ability to make child support payments. Four of the 14 members of the Brownsville focus group could be confirmed as having steady employment and making regular contributions to their children. As many as three other members of that group may also have been contributing regularly. The others did not work regularly; several of the men spent substantial portions of their sporadic income on drugs and alcohol.

Much of the discussion in these groups dealt with the fact that many of these men have difficulty supporting even themselves. Four of them received public assistance in their own names. One of those who was employed described his finances: $125 a week take-home pay, $65 a week for rent, plus carfare, clothes, and food. But he expressed pride in the fact that he had held his job for over a year.

Some of the men's comments on their inability to support themselves and their children included:

> You can't work for your child and not live too.
>
> It ain't enough money for me to support her and support me.
>
> If you cannot take care of yourself, you cannot take care of your kids.

Most of those who appeared to be making regular payments were working two jobs. Among those who did not have steady employment, it appeared that several were being partially supported by women. One, who was living with his child and the mother, was taking care of the child while the mother worked, though he said the situation had been the reverse previously. Others were living with women on public assistance, which they supplemented either through sporadic legitimate work or occasional street hustles. There was some animated banter in the Harlem group about "pimping." They used this term to describe accepting material support or taking money from women, not supervising prostitution. The tone of the banter indicated that this practice is a recognized way of getting money, partly shameful and partly to be boasted about, depending on the setting.

The other side of pimping, however, concerned the relationship between having money and being able to attract and retain the interest of women. One described the situation as follows: "If a man is with a lady . . . and he can't find a job . . . you know what happens to that guy? He wilters, folds up."

Another discussion centered on the relative emotional vulnerability of men and women. The group agreed that men were more vulnerable and were prone to deep depression and suicide when relationships that they cared about fell apart. One man, who had been married, told an extended story of how his inability to support his family led the mother of his child to leave him and move out of the state. He said that this had driven him to heavy drug use. He said:

> My heart got touched, and it hurts. See, men go out there and flip. I was doing drugs. They drug themselves to death, be ready to kill themselves.

The economic difficulties of some of the men were also apparent among those who spoke of getting money by selling drugs and other forms of crime, which they referred to generically as "hustling." In contrast to the usual portrayals of drug-dealing, the hustling experiences of the men who participated in the focus groups had not led to quick fortunes. Hustling was for them a highly unreliable source of income, attractive mainly in comparison to their poor opportunities for legitimate employment. Despite some boasting about prowess in street hustles, it was readily apparent from the men's appearance, the evaluations of their peers, and their own statements that those who participated in the focus groups were no more successful as hustlers than they were in the legitimate job market.

One man said that he was currently hustling and that "when I come off big, that's when I send something to my ex-girl." At the same time, he admitted that his hustling income was insecure and that "at least working's a steady check." Another hustler openly wanted to quit what he was doing, saying: "Hopefully

I can leave this hustler gig and get a honest job, you know, 'cause what I do now . . . it's gonna run out."

The men saw substantial difficulties involved in the prospects of getting steady, decent jobs, however. One said that hustling created problems between him and his girlfriend:

> She didn't want me to be out in the street hustling, and it was something I wanted to do, the only thing I really knew how to do to make money.

Another said that he had learned this from his family since adolescence:

> I've been doing it from—like, most of my family is in the business, like my uncle. I'm down, you know, since about 16.

Not all of the men in the Harlem and Brownsville groups were involved in criminal lifestyles, but there was a recognition in the discussions that many men in their communities lead lives that are cut off from the mainstream. For example, in talking about possible programmatic initiatives, one man noted that many men he knew could not get into various programs because they had never registered with Selective Service. Other comments and data indicated that some were working "off the books" or under false Social Security numbers, many were not working at all, some were involved with drugs and crime, and some had no fixed address.

Both the men with substantial employment histories and those without spoke about their lack of access to decent jobs and the underlying reasons for this. They mentioned low levels of education and the instability of jobs they did find. Some complained of having learned skills that became outdated. The most frequently mentioned problem, however, was racial discrimination in the job market. This came up several times in the Harlem and Brownsville groups without being specifically elicited by the focus group leaders:

> The jobs is what's wrong. They hire you for two weeks, get your hopes up, squeeze in a white boy. I don't want to go home and face her and the kids with no work. I don't want to go to jail.
>
> I see a little racism in the agencies, but I still go down.
>
> I resented white loaders who got to be loadmasters. I felt I could be a loadmaster.

Understanding the Child Support System

These men had very little knowledge of the specific workings of the child support system. Those who had been through the system, including at least 5 of the 31 men in the Harlem and Brownsville focus groups, knew more than the others. These men tended to be older and to have more substantial employment histories. Indeed, none of the younger men (in their late teens to early twenties) had ever been in the system. Even those who had been in the system, however, knew very little about it.

Most of the men were unaware of the requirements for establishing legal paternity, for example. Several men in one of the groups said that they were the legal fathers of their children because they had been present at the birth and signed papers. Some of those with children by different mothers said that they were legal fathers of one but not others, also on the basis of whether they had signed papers at the birth. Then one of the group members informed the others, correctly and to their surprise and disbelief, that this was not a sufficient basis for establishing legal paternity, saying that he had learned this in the National Guard.

Members of this same group were also unaware of the highly accurate methods of blood-testing now used in disputed paternity establishment cases. They thought that men with the same blood type were equally likely to be the father of a child with a compatible type on the basis of tests. One said:

> If I had one blood test and my best friend had the same blood type and she was fooling around, who is to say he didn't do it too?

Another expressed the same erroneous belief that current tests are based only on blood type:

> You have people that is no kin to you, have the same type of blood; that is not exact, they cannot take you to court to produce some money.

When asked whether their children would be entitled to Social Security and benefits for military dependents if they were not married but had established legal paternity, they all said that they thought this *should* be the case but were not certain whether it was. (Legal paternity does confer these benefits upon children born outside marriage.)

Several were also unaware of the existence of AFDC benefits for two-parent families (in the AFDC-U program), even though New York State has had such a program for years, as well as a Home Relief welfare program for poor families that do not qualify for AFDC. They thought that marriage automatically entailed a cutoff of a woman's AFDC benefits: "Once you are married to them all legal, the welfare cuts her off." Similarly: "The public assistance, a woman can't get it if she is with a man. She can get it if they separate, or the sneak trip [that is, concealment of the relationship]." When one member told the others that they and their children could get welfare if they all lived together, he encountered expressions of disbelief. But an even more surprising aspect of the focus group discussions was the revelation that several of the men who were in contact with their children and their children's mothers did not know whether their children were receiving public assistance.

Even some of the men who had received court orders for child support were baffled at how the system worked. One said he had been puzzled when his paycheck was garnisheed, until he realized that it was the result of a child support action. He said they were "getting it out of my check. I couldn't figure it out. I find out it is for the child support payment. That is the only thing they could take it out for." Another focus group participant had the same experience with a deduction from his income tax return: "I was supposed to get a check for $900, got back $127. I flipped."

One aspect of the child support system that the Harlem and Brownsville men did understand, however, was the fact that court-mandated support payments to children on AFDC go primarily to reimburse the state.

Attitudes Toward the Child Support System

The men in the Harlem and Brownsville focus groups expressed a variety of negative attitudes toward the current child support system, ranging from a generalized but uninformed suspicion among those who had not experienced it directly to a much more specific set of grievances among those who had.

Most of these men had never had child support orders, despite the fact that all of them were noncustodial fathers. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Some of the men had not established legal paternity; not all of their children were enrolled in AFDC, which theoretically requires custodial parents to cooperate with paternity and child support establishment procedures; several had made informal arrangements with the mothers of their children; and several had very little income for the mothers to seek. Three of 14 members of the Brownsville group and at least 2 of the 17 members of the Harlem groups did have child support orders.

When asked why some men fail to establish paternity at all, they offered two sorts of answers. First, they said that men may be "afraid of responsibility." For one focus group participant, that fear was clearly related to the child support enforcement system. He said:

> The first thing they want you to do is make sure that baby has your name on the birth certificate. If anything happens, right, she can get some cream out of you. Legally, she can say that I am the father.

Specific fears of the child support enforcement system, however, were not usually cited as the main reason why men do not establish paternity.

Second, they maintained that the women did not want child support. One man stated that "women nowadays, well, the ones I meet, they don't want your last name for the simple fact that they want to control the child." Another said that he had filled out all the necessary papers for establishing paternity and that the mother had told him she would file them but she never did. He did not discover this until she disappeared on a drug binge and he found himself unable to get custody of the child. In view of the low incomes of many of these men, it is perhaps not surprising that some women prefer not to share parental rights with them, even at the expense of forfeiting child support claims.

Those who did have child support orders resented the whole process, and all felt overwhelmed by their inability to make the required payments. Their resentments can be divided into two categories: (1) a general feeling that the courts should not interfere in their families and (2) a more specific resentment of the insensitivity of the system toward their precarious and shifting circumstances.

The generalized resentment appears to be simply a matter of not liking to submit to outside controls. One man, the father of five children by three different mothers and a veteran of many child support battles, was adamant in his dislike of the system. During a lengthy discussion of different ways in which the system might be made more fair to men, he declared unequivocally:

> I don't want the court in my life, they have no business messing with my relationship. . . . I don't want the system to come up with a way to make me pay.

The self-interestedness of this position, however, was apparent to the other men in the group. When asked whether they thought women would agree with their attitudes that the courts should not interfere, they laughed and said "no."

When discussing their own experiences with the system, however, the men were more specific about what they considered to be the ridiculous aspects of the way the system operates. They reported that the system frequently put them in impossible situations, hampering rather than encouraging their efforts to provide support, and that it provided very little incentive for them to cooperate. Those who had child support orders said that they simply could not pay what was being asked. One complained:

> They sent me a court order to pay like $600 a month. I don't even make that much every two weeks, and I wasn't planning on paying something I don't have.

Another faced a different but related problem. He was married and wanted a divorce but felt he could not get one because he could not afford the 17 percent of his income that he had been told would be required (on the basis of the state's child support guidelines). All of those with support orders were behind in their payments, with arrearages ranging from a few hundred to several thousand dollars.

Besides feeling that they were simply being asked to pay too much, these men were particularly bitter about what they viewed as the courts' insensitivity to their precarious circumstances. One complained: "These agencies, they don't listen to you. All they want to know is 'How much?' and 'Give it up.'" Another told of his unsuccessful attempts to get his support order adjusted when he went from a higher- to a lower-paying job:

> I am making less money than the first time. I went and said: "Can you cut it down?" I showed them papers. These are my expenses. All they said was: "You still have to give this amount of money." . . . It could have been difficult to eat, and these people knew exactly what I was making, but they still wanted money.

Still another expressed incredulity that he accumulated arrearages while incarcerated. He said: "The court should know that you are locked up."

One man also said that he thought the court process itself produced further unnecessary strain between him and the mother of his child. They had negotiated an agreement between themselves, but he felt the judge had prodded her to try to get more money out of him. He concluded: "The court wants you to hate her so much." Another man agreed, saying:

> The court system, in my opinion, is extreme, a bit too extreme. You can make a bond with your wife for financial needs or whatever the case but the court system will double it.

Still another man protested that court-ordered child support created bad feelings on the part of his son:

> My child should not have to grow up with something in the back of his mind: "Somebody had to force dad to give me. If only he would have freely given."

These men generally felt that the demands of the system were entirely unrealistic, given their low levels of income. Their experience of accumulating arrearages added to their sense of not being able to survive financially. One man, who had a relatively stable history of employment and child support contributions but had recently been unemployed, said in response to a question about what a child support program should offer in the way of employment and training:

> I have bills above my head. If I got a little job, my whole check can't even pay . . . all the bills. So I would never be able to pay back unless I am talking about an extraordinary job.

These men were keenly aware of the fact that court-ordered child support payments to children on AFDC do not go directly to the children. Most seemed to think that none of the money went to the children; they did not seem aware of the provision for a $50 "disregard," which could increase their children's benefits as a result of their contributions. One man clearly was discouraged from paying. He said: "She wasn't seeing nothing. And my son wasn't seeing nothing. So I wasn't paying nothing." Another complained: "It's not going to the child's mother, has to be going to the system." A third said:

> Say welfare has been taking care of the child for the last three years until they caught up with you; they caught up with you now. Your wife wouldn't see the money on the welfare check . . . they are just getting their money back.

One of the focus group participants, however, thought the system not entirely unreasonable, saying:

> I still have to send $50 a week to the court. They are not getting that $50 you know . . . [but] . . . they are still getting because welfare is getting it. I don't really mind.

Other men talked about the fact that the welfare and child support system rules induced many couples to conceal their relationship in order to be able to combine income from welfare and work. One described this situation as:

> She goes to the welfare: "My husband left me, I can't find him. Boom, he ran off and left me." But he is still there. You know what welfare do? They put her back on public assistance.

A member of another group described this strategy in almost identical words:

> The husband ain't never left, but the wife goes to the welfare and says that he has after 30 days and the welfare puts her back on.

Others nodded assent at the familiarity of this situation. It was unclear how many of them were doing this or had done it, although all of them were living apart from at least one of their children. However, they did not seem to think that men fail to establish paternity in the first place in order to be able to combine welfare and work illegally. This was characterized as a strategy of women, to respond to the unsteady support from men.

Improving the System

When asked about possible changes in the child support system to encourage their cooperation, the men responded with some opinions generally favorable to interventions being explored in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration.

In discussing the current system, they expressed some of their feelings about fairness. For example, one discussion concerned what it costs to support children of different ages. One man said contributions should be higher for older children:

> I believe it is an age bracket thing. If you have a newborn baby, it is going to be cheaper to take care of. As a baby gets older it costs more.

Another discussion concerned the setting of payment levels as a fixed percentage of income. Some thought this completely unfair. One man complained:

> When the money that I was giving previous to that great job was sufficient enough and when I got more, suddenly I need more. Which is, like he said, totally unfair.

This opinion proved highly controversial, however, and provoked a long discussion. Some participants supported the view that the practice is unfair, while others agreed with a man who said: "If you are making more money, you are supposed to give more to the child."

The men liked the idea of mediation, a service planned for Parents' Fair Share. They said that they had been involved in misunderstandings with the mother of their children that might have been cleared up by a third party, and that disagreements had been perpetuated because of anger when solutions could have been found. One said: "I would be happy with the counselor part of it." Another said:

> Any time you have someone that is neutral that is willing to explain things from a different point of view, both mine and hers, it has to help because this person in the middle might be able to tell me something I don't understand.

The notion of changing the child support system so that arrearages did not accumulate while the men were taking part in a program received a solid endorsement. The men also responded favorably to the possibility of being offered employment and job training. When asked what changes should be made in the child support system, one man immediately replied: "I'd key in to the system and get people jobs, help them out, on they feet, see what they do then."

Although the idea of getting good jobs clearly appealed to them, some also offered cautions about training programs, based on their previous experiences. Several had already been in employment and training programs, and most of these said they had been helped by such programs. Still, they continued to face recurrent employment difficulties. Some said they had learned skills that had become outdated. One of these said: "It depends on what you are going to be trained in, if you train in something that the country needs." Another asked: "What is it going to lead to? You have to have a career, something that you want to do."

Others pointed out that existing programs have difficulties recruiting and retaining clients, concluding that the problems lay in the motivations of those who need the programs as well as in the effectiveness of the programs. On the whole, however, they seemed to feel that, if the courts were going to demand payments from them, they should also be given jobs. They also mentioned specific skills in which they were interested. These included working with computers, auto mechanics, aviation mechanics, refrigeration, printing, carpentry, electronics, cooking, and photography.

The Harlem and Brownsville men also offered some thoughts on what would make mediation and employment services effective for them and those like them. These comments reflected their feelings of being the victims of racial discrimination. Some said that they would feel more comfortable with counselors and program staff who were black and male like themselves. One described a previous experience:

> A lot of counseling services that is here for us is not properly staffed. I went down for family counseling. I am not racist. I have white friends . . . [but] . . . it is hard for a white guy to understand my particular family structure.

Another commented similarly on the staffing of programs for them, saying: "If it just has white guys, it may not work. If it just has women, it may not work." The men also noted that racial discrimination in the labor market could make the acquisition of skills useless unless they could get hired to use those skills. One man's curt response to the prospect of getting training was: "No jobs. What's the sense?" They also mentioned other services they needed, including psychiatrists, mental health services, and drug treatment. One man from

Brownsville said he would like to be able to meet with successful men who had grown up in areas like his:

> In a lot of black neighborhoods, the drug dealer is the man, economic man. And there are a lot of people who achieved big. Those who have high financial status or businesses or whatever, I feel that [there should be] a special program where they could come back and teach people like they do in Harlem and give them sufficient sense of individualism that you can make an individual achievement.

The Queens Group

Family Histories

As in the Harlem and Brownsville groups, many of the white men from Queens expressed strong feelings for their children and considerable regret at their physical and often emotional separation from them. The one apparent exception was Frank,[1] father of a 20-year-old daughter, who had had only a brief and casual relationship with the mother when his daughter was conceived:

> It was like the weekend I was drafted into Vietnam. She got pregnant, she chose to keep the child, not to abort it, and I respect her for it . . . I wasn't there for her in any way; I wasn't in love with her or anything. I respect the mother, she lives within walking distance.

In response to a question about whether his daughter knows that he is her father, he explained:

> No. I give her [the mother] the respect of the choice since I had no feelings for her and I wasn't there as far as financial or whatever. Until she chooses to say, "Yes, this is him" . . . as far as I'm concerned, it's part of a thing of respecting her wishes. She just wishes me not to say anything until she's ready herself.

Frank did not openly express regret about the situation, other than a shrug that seemed to indicate a sense of water under the bridge.

All of the other men in the Queens group had more substantial relationships with the mothers of their children and either had been married to them or had lived with them at some time, except for Ken, age 23, who maintained a close but no longer romantic relationship with the mother:

> I was not married. Me and the mother had a good relationship; we still do as friends. I got her pregnant at 19 and the family despises me now. I had no problems with drugs or anything. I've been working. I'm unemployed now. The parents basically told her they would disown her if she stayed with me. I didn't want that, but I've kept distance for two years and she basically brings the kid to see me. We

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[1] The names used in this section and in the remainder of the report are fictitious, and some of the details of the parents' lives have been changed to protect their privacy.

> remain good friends; we know it's not going to work out between us and she brings him over when she has a chance.

Five of the men had been married to the mothers of their children, and a sixth said he had been in a common-law marriage. All had had substantial contact with their children during the children's early years. One of these older men had since lost contact, but the others who had been married all still saw their children on a regular, if not always harmonious, basis.

George and Tony, both age 38, said that their relationships with their children had improved since they had broken up with the mothers. Both said they had been "out there running," meaning involved with drugs, and that this had contributed to the breakup of their families. At the time of the focus group, Tony was on methadone and George had been completely clean for some time. As they had withdrawn from "running in the street," their relationships with their children had improved. George's 16-year-old son was living with the mother's mother:

> First eight years, I lived with her. When we broke up, her mother took care of the kid. We were both [himself and his wife] getting high at the time. If you are running around, trying to cop, you can't be doing right . . . are you going to hang out with your kid stoned? I don't want to hang out with my kid when I'm stoned . . . [Now] I see him once a week; sometimes once every two weeks. Like on Saturday and Sunday, mostly on Sunday. I pick him up, we would have dinner with my mother, a family dinner . . . I get along with the grandmother better now than when I was married.

Tony lived with his children for 10 years before splitting up with his wife:

> I have two daughters, 14 and 13 years old . . . I got a dynamite relationship with my daughters. The past three years before that, it wasn't. I was always on drugs, in and out of the house. I didn't know how to be a parent, how to be a father. Being around kids got me jumpy, jittering. I got nervous and mad.

Will, in contrast, had been close to his children when they were growing up but then went out of their lives. Will was 49 and had three grown children. After 13 years of marriage, he began drinking too much, split up with his wife, and subsequently lost contact with her and the children:

> They are all living in Wisconsin and Iowa, so I don't get to see them much. I'm now married a second time.

Hal, age 41, had an 18-year-old son whose mother he had divorced when the boy was three. He attributed the breakup primarily to marital infidelity on his part. Since then, he had had minimal but regular contact with his son. He saw him only twice a year, on Christmas and the boy's birthday. Hal said he had made regular and substantial support payments for 15 years. Mickey, age 40 and on methadone, had been married twice and had one daughter from each marriage. He was estranged from the first child but very close to the second:

> Like the first child, the 17-year-old, I see every couple of months. She doesn't want to be bothered with me because daddy is a dope fiend. I started out very, very close with the little one. She is a gifted child. They say she is a genius. We sent letters to the special schools. There is monthly support . . . I buy sneakers for her and buy clothes when I get my checks the first of the month . . . forget it, I buy her anything. I spoil her because I'm afraid of losing her like I lost my first daughter. It's a very uncomfortable feeling to have a 17-year-old daughter treat you like you're not her father. I am a dope fiend but I deserve to be treated better. I rocked her to bed, I deserve to be treated better . . . I got a disease but I was a kind, generous person . . . I would be devastated and I will go out of my mind if I lose my second daughter.

The other men had never been married and varied in the extent of their attachments to their children. Bill, 24, also said that he had gotten closer to his three-year-old daughter recently since getting on methadone. He had been living with the mother when she became pregnant but:

> The reason we never stayed together, I was locked up when the baby was born. I got out four months later. When I came out, she didn't want me there. So, for like the first year, I didn't bother with either one of them. I started to recently, a year ago. They needed money. When I cleaned up, when I got on the methadone program, I started seeing them. I got a real job. I wanted my daughter in my life. I tried to see my daughter as much as I could, but they are going to be moving out to Long Island this summer.

Bill said he had seen the child at least twice a month over the past year.

Stan, 27, had at first lived with the mother of his seven-year-old daughter and still maintained regular contact with the child, though he did not get along well with the mother:

> If I want to take her out for weekends, we are pretty cool. She will let me take her out. I get to see my kid but not as much as I can. If she [the mother] is mad, she screws me up. If I make plans, she don't be home or . . . I call the house and there won't be no answer.

Two of the other unmarried men had lived with their children and the mothers at first but had only sporadic contact since breaking up with the mothers. Rick, 29, said his wife had gotten involved with another man two years before, when his son was three. Since then, he had only seen the boy at Christmas and on the child's birthday. Sal, 39, had a very bitter breakup with his common-law wife. He had not seen his 13-year-old son in five years and had completely lost touch for the past two years. He reported missing his son intensely.

Fatherhood

Most of the men in the Queens group had grown up with their fathers in the home. Only Mickey and George said that they had grown up without their fathers. George said he did not think he had been affected by it "one way or the other," but Mickey, who did know his father, was intensely bitter toward the man and his refusal ever to give Mickey credit for any positive accomplishment. Sal, like Mickey, was very bitter that his father never gave him credit when he performed well in school or sports. In discussing their relationships with their fathers, the other men revealed a variety of hostile and ambivalent attitudes toward them, despite the fact that their fathers had been present. Tony said:

> Just the way his generation, how they were brought up. Well, my father may eat, sleep, go to work, that's it. They didn't know what the family thing was. All they knew was holiday, Christmas, Thanksgiving. Just once a year to get close to one another. Just because Christmas is coming, everybody is happy now. It should be like that every day.

The other men then started nodding agreement about the distance of their fathers. Hal was the only one who said he had a warm relationship with his father: "Not to interrupt you . . . we were not just father and son, we were friends." After Hal spoke about his friendship with his father, Mickey said: "That's a very rare thing." Several of the others nodded agreement.

When asked what kinds of relationships they would like to have with their children, the men talked about their shame at some of the mistakes they had made, their desire just to see the children, and their feelings that fathers should be teachers.

As noted earlier, George and Tony felt guilty about having been involved with drugs at the time their children were born. Even though none of these men were currently IV drug users, sometimes their children still heard negative things about them from others. Tony had been in prison:

> It is like a Peyton Place in certain neighborhoods . . . I'd rather tell them myself. If my daughter asked me, what is your career, I'd say I was a tractor-trailer driver . . . before that, I went away. I did something wrong. I told her I was in prison.

Mickey also spoke very emotionally about having to explain to his adored younger daughter, then eight years old, about why he had been in the hospital so often:

> She thought I was working in the hospital. I was in detox every couple of months. Finally, I broke down and cried that daddy has a problem.

Others reported much more positive experiences of being with their children, sometimes more so in the recent past than while they were breaking up with the mothers. Stan said:

> You have to take your kid out, get close to your kid. You take him to the movies, whatever, and play with them, stuff like that, brings you close to the kid. You don't get to see him, try to make up for all the days that you miss.

Tony said he wanted to "bring up my daughter, teach right from wrong." Sal said he was upset at being separated from his son because the boy especially needed a father during his teenage years:

> I miss, like, playing, teaching him how to play baseball and things like that. He is growing up. This is the time he needs a man, not a woman, telling him what's right, what's wrong. At that age, they are so mixed up, they need both.

Some men also talked about the obstacles they faced trying to get close to their children. Sal, Will, and Hal had all lost contact almost entirely after early bonding with their children. George said that when he has little money, it interferes with his relationship with his 16-year-old son:

> I see him, to try to have quality time. I notice when I am not doing too good, I'm out of work and things are rough with me moneywise . . . it puts a little cramp on the relationship. It shouldn't, but I'm down on myself.
>
> Q: Does the kid know that or does it come from the mother?
>
> George: I think he knows that. A couple of times, I tell him for the week he was out of school, that my unemployment check didn't come. I wanted to take him to the movies when he was out of school during the daytime, and I couldn't do it.

Stan said his child's mother sometimes blocks his visits and that she gets disappointed when he has nothing to contribute.

Some of the men talked about the problem of other men coming between them and their children. Ken said that despite his warm current relationship with the mother:

> The only thing that is going to bother me in the future is if she moves in with somebody else or marries somebody else. That's the only thing that scares me about that. If she finds somebody else and gets married, that guy is going to be raising my kid.

Rick had been through that experience and subsequently had had very little contact with his daughter:

> Like the first three years of life she knows me as daddy. Another guy moved in and he was there as daddy . . . We [he and the mother] didn't get along. She found somebody else she was interested in and it seemed like that's what she wanted. She didn't think I was good enough for her.

Income and Child Support

Despite the fact that many of the men in the Queens group had experienced personal problems, most of them had substantial work histories. Although most of them were out of work at the time of the focus group, only Will, Sal, and Bill were not looking for work. Will had been disabled for a dozen years and was supported by his second wife. Sal was living with his family and on methadone. Bill had been employed until a recent injury and was receiving public assistance in his own name.

Many of the others had recently been laid off. They were collecting unemployment and seeking work. The fact that a stipend was offered for participation in the focus group may explain, in part, why a high proportion of the participants were out of work. Also, the kinds of jobs these men had held in the past were primarily in manual labor and construction, which have recently experienced severe contraction in New York City. The neighborhoods in Queens where these men live are currently full of unemployed blue-collar workers.

Although most of the men were in the labor force, the stability and quality of their employment varied. Mickey, Tony, and Frank told similar stories of having been steady workers for many years, despite having drug problems. Frank said:

> I got laid off almost a year ago. That particular job I worked at 18 months straight, 7 days a week, 60 to 65 hours. It was in a restaurant/bar; I did prep work . . . I had worked for 19 years. I am registered with Social Security for 18 or 19 years' worth of paying into the system. I worked all my life; it's only been the last year that I was out of work. The last time was 18 years ago, when I came out of the service. I was a functional addict all my life.

Despite his steady employment, Frank had never contributed child support because the child was never publicly acknowledged as his and did not even know he was the father.

Tony had lived with his children for 10 years before going to prison for three. He supported them while he lived with them and had made regular voluntary contributions since his release. He was one of the few whose children had been on welfare, though that was only while he was incarcerated. He said:

> My problem was I thought I loved the girl but I didn't. [But] I got pregnant with her twice. I'm not going to say: "The hell with the kids, the hell with that girl."

Mickey had also been steadily employed for years, despite drug problems that sometimes drove him into detox. He made regular contributions to his younger daughter, though not to his older daughter, who did not want to have anything to do with him.

Another of the older men, Hal, had also been a steady worker. He had worked for a construction company for many years. He derived a good income from that, and he also had made money on the side from occasional robberies.

He had once done prison time but claimed to have paid $800 a month in voluntary child support steadily for the past 15 years. Even when he was incarcerated, he had hidden enough money to provide for his son.

Several of these men said that they were in the labor market, were usually employed, and made voluntary contributions to their children when they were working. Most of them described similar relationships with their children's mothers over money: The women had never taken them to court for child support payments and basically knew what and when they could contribute or not. Stan was working at a job that was "off the books":

> With a kid, you want to avoid problems like that. You love the kids as much as she does. If you and her don't get along, fine; your kid is something different. You want to try to look out for the kid and give him the best of everything. You don't want to be dragged through the court just to do the right thing. She [the mother] understood. I mean, like a couple of times at Christmas she was really upset. I seen it on her face, but she didn't come out and say anything. She pretty much understands. She knows what I have and don't have. At this point, I'm trying to do it on my own, without her asking.

George's son had been living with his grandmother since his parents split up:

> Her mother took care of the kid. At that time, I wasn't working or nothing. Anyhow, she didn't get any money from me. Once I cleaned up and started working again, I bought him his clothes and gave her money. Up until a month and a half ago. I just lost my job again, just last month. He just got braces a couple months ago. I was giving money for that besides. When I see him, I give him $10, $20. I didn't give her nothing for January; February it will be the same thing. She never asked me for money anyhow. Never asked me for money, so I always gave it on my own.

Ken only saw his child when the mother brought him over secretly because the mother's family did not want her to see him:

> She is still at home and her parents are supporting the bill. She is still in school and going to college. She understands I am collecting unemployment. I haven't given them [anything] the past three months.

He said he had been contributing about $25 a week voluntarily when he was employed:

> Basically, I had the money to give to them, I gave to them. I was working at my last job two years. I got laid off in November. The work was slow. I worked in the binding business. I became a manager. As far as the kid, money was never an issue because it was another issue between us. I don't have a sad story like these guys. I still get along with her.

Ken said he had no drug problems. His main problems were youth, a slow economy, and having fathered a child to a young, middle-class girl whose parents hated him.

Two other men in their twenties, Bill and Rick, were in more troubled circumstances. Bill had no contact with his child at first, having been in jail when the boy was born, and then began making small weekly contributions when he could:

> The first time, I was in jail when the baby was born and I think her family talked to her. They didn't want me as part of her life. When I got out, I started working. I gave the money, you know. And then it stopped because, like I said, they didn't want me near the kid and I started to get high again. I started to [give money] recently, a year ago. They needed money. If I was working, I would give them money. If I was not working, I didn't. I gave what I could. She hasn't taken me to court or nothing. If they need something, I give them what I can. And, like I said, I'm not getting high either, so I have money.

He said he had contributed $50 to $70 a week when he was working and that he had worked over seven months out of the past year, although he had been receiving public assistance since an injury a few months before.

Rick had had very minimal contact with his son since the mother left him for another man. Although Rick had never been involved with IV drugs, he said that using other drugs and alcohol had caused him to lose several jobs. He only saw his son or gave him anything on Christmas and birthdays.

Only four men in the Queens group had ever had any contact with courts over child support issues. All four of them had been married. George said his wife had tried to take him to court at first, but "she couldn't get anything anyhow because I wasn't working." It is unclear how the case was disposed. Subsequently, the mother, who had her own problems, relinquished custody to her mother, who never sought money from George. Mickey paid child support to his first wife in an agreement worked out in court during the divorce:

> My first marriage, my wife was on welfare and I was unemployed. I was facing prison, so I guess she more or less felt sorry for me. The judge felt like, well, we got along: "You come up with your own conclusion of what you think," and she said, "$20 a week."

He paid that for two years, but that had been many years before. Currently, he only gave occasional presents to his older daughter and concentrated his resources on the younger one.

Only Tony and Will had ever faced orders to pay child support arrears. Will had not seen his first wife or children in several years, when a joint bank account that he maintained with his second wife was unexpectedly garnisheed. At that point, Will had been disabled for some time and had no income of his own. The money all came from his wife's earnings. The incident angered his current wife, but they subsequently took his name off the account and had no further incidents. Tony's wife had received welfare when he was incarcerated:

> When I was doing time, there was no other means for my wife with the kid. At the time, to get support was to go to welfare, and that's what she did. A certain amount of time went by, 10 years or better, I got the letter from welfare stating that I owed them so much money. I never answered their letter. It was a couple of thousand dollars and until today I haven't gotten bothered yet. When it does happen, I don't know what to do.

It appears that the main reason Tony has escaped further legal action to recover welfare payments is that he "never had a job on the books so far."

Tony's case reveals a crucial part of the context of these men's lives that explains why, even though they are noncustodial fathers and many have substantial work histories, most have not been taken to court for child support. Only Mickey's and Tony's children have ever received AFDC. Without the prompting of the welfare system, the decision to initiate court proceedings was left to the mothers of their children, and in most cases the couples arrived at their own informal arrangements for support payments.

Of course, it is likely that the women would tell different stories about how satisfactory they found these informal arrangements. Still, the fact that most of these 11 cases have never been in court is striking. The men's contentions that the women knew what they were capable of paying and were not interested in pursuing them when they could not pay seems plausible, as does the notion that when some of them were "running," the women and their families wanted to have as little to do with them as possible.

Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward the Child Support Enforcement System

The men in the Queens focus group had only hazy and incomplete knowledge of how legal paternity is established outside of marriage in New York City. Because many of them had been married, they had never been concerned about this. Some of the unmarried men, however, thought that they had established legal paternity, although they may not have done so. Both Sal and Ken expressed confusion on this issue in response to questions about whether they were the legal fathers of their children:

> Sal: I believe so . . . I took her to the hospital, I signed papers, I paid for the hospital bill, and she claimed I was the father.
>
> Q: You have to go to court and go through a separate hearing for that.
>
> Sal: Then I guess I'm not the legal father.

> Ken: No, the baby has my name [but I didn't go to court].
>
> Q: So you thought you had legal paternity?
>
> Ken: Until you said something, yes . . . Once my name was on the birth certificate, I thought it was mine.

Since it is not clear exactly what papers Sal and Ken signed, it is not certain whether they were or were not legally the fathers of their children. Once the question was raised, however, they were thrown into doubt.

The paternity status of the other unmarried men was not clear. It seems highly unlikely that either Bill or Frank had established legal paternity, since Bill was incarcerated at the time of the birth and Frank was in Vietnam. The paternity statuses of Stan and Rick were also uncertain.

If none of these men had in fact established legal paternity, this would help to explain, along with the low incidence of welfare receipt among their children and the mothers, their lack of contact with the child support enforcement system. In contrast to the Harlem and Brownsville focus group members, most of these men were aware of the high degree of accuracy of blood tests for establishing paternity. Only Bill and Rick thought that blood tests were of doubtful accuracy. Bill mistakenly thought the tests only matched blood types of parents and children. The rest of them correctly stated that the tests are 90 percent accurate or better.

The men also said they were aware of a number of benefits available to the children of unmarried fathers, such as private health insurance through employers and Social Security death benefits. They were not, however, aware that benefits from the military can go to the children of unmarried fathers.

Discussion of benefits legally available to the children of unmarried fathers triggered a great deal of interest among the unmarried fathers in the group. Jolted by the knowledge that they may not have been legal fathers when they thought they were, and then stimulated by finding out about these various benefits, they began asking about and discussing the steps needed to establish legal paternity. A spin-off discussion then addressed the difference between child support and alimony. Tony apparently was not clear about the difference until Hal explained it to him:

> Tony: She gets remarried, she can charge me for child support?
>
> Hal: My last wife had a daughter [from her former husband]. Here's the deal. The husband was paying her alimony and child support for the daughter. When me and her got married, her alimony stopped but the child support continued.

At this explanation, others in the group nodded and sighed in what seemed to be both agreement and relief. Stan expressed his sense that this is just: "Child support I don't mind."

Two of the men who had had limited contact with the child support enforcement system, Will and Tony, were bewildered by its operations. Will had been completely surprised when his checking account with his current wife had been garnisheed, since he had had no contact with his former wife in years. Tony had heard from the system twice, both times after his wife's welfare had been terminated. The second time, years later, the amount of child support arrears had tripled:

> I seen that letter, I say, $6,000–what, are they crazy? They should have the wrong guy.

Reactions to Program Ideas

The final discussion with the Queens group concerned possible elements of a program for noncustodial fathers. They were told that the focus group was being held to help in setting up a program for noncustodial fathers—especially to induce fathers to pay regular child support through the formal system. When asked about employment and training services, a peer support group, and mediation, they responded most strongly by far to the possibility of employment and training:

> Q: Some of you guys have grown children now, [but] thinking about the young guy who might want to get into the program, what would make him want to sign up?
>
> Sal: To better himself.
>
> Frank: To better the child.
>
> Sal: If he betters himself, he is going to better the welfare of the child.
>
> Q: Employment and training, do you think that would tempt you guys? If they say: "We're going to train you to get your GED or get a job or get a better job than you have now"?
>
> Hal: That goes without saying. Anyone out of work would be happy to go along with that program.
>
> Ken: If I were to get a nice decent-paying job, I would go through the court system. I would think guys would go through the court system and not mind paying the child support.
>
> Sal: I think that if they come up with the starting salary of $10 an hour or more. Especially if they have the chance . . . to guarantee a certain level of pay, they can afford it to pay his own apartment and still send his child $50 a week or something.
>
> Stan: The kid is going to benefit and the father is going to benefit. He is going to help himself.

When asked about what kinds of training or jobs they would be interested in, they tended to name things that they had once done or tried, their best past opportunities. Tony had once had a successful contracting business, painting and moving, and would like to return to that. Sal once worked with racehorses and wanted to return to that, though he was also interested in learning about computers. Tony wanted to resume work as truck driver. Stan had taken college courses and would like financial aid to continue in higher education. Hal said he is currently in a training course to become an Emergency Medical Technician. Two of the younger men mentioned fields they were interested in but where they had no previous experience. Bill was interested in computers and Ken in "accounting . . . or something with figures."

Their reactions to possible peer group support meetings and mediation were much more equivocal. Hal spontaneously mentioned the possibility of parent education: "I think, for a single parent, how to relate and deal, you know, with your child." Others, however, were more leery of the notion of a support group:

> Tony: That's my problem. I wouldn't want to talk about my family affairs . . . You have to be honest if you are going to be in a group. You are going to come into the group and you have got to talk about a female or what you have done with her or whatever . . . if you are not going to say anything, don't waste your time, and leave.

Ken differed:

> Push comes to shove, we all have something in common in a way. Nobody in this room is going to see the people we're talking about. It's basically for support. I can open up . . .
>
> Q: So you would feel positive about that?
>
> Ken: Yes.

Sal and Tony compared this idea to their experience with the group therapy they had received in connection with their past drug problems. Tony said he had just learned how to say what was expected in the group, but Sal said that he had eventually opened up and that the experience had been helpful. He cautioned that it took a long time.

In response to the possibility of having mediation available to fathers like them, Ken said it might be a good idea, but, in his case, "thing is, that would open a can of worms." He had no hopes of establishing communication with the family of the mother of his child. Mickey talked about a priest in his neighborhood who did this kind of work, and others began nodding as that example made the idea clear to them. However, no one spoke out strongly and positively for mediation.

After the group broke up, several members provided further evidence of their interest in employment and training by coming up to the interviewer and asking if they could enroll in the program if it came to their area, specifically mentioning their interest in jobs.

Implications for Policy and Parents' Fair Share

These New York City interviews suggest important challenges, possibly formidable ones, for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. Many of the men who shared their experiences and opinions were highly disadvantaged. They represented a group that has not been effectively incorporated into the child support enforcement system. Although negative attitudes and behaviors conforming to popular stereotypes of absent and nonsupporting fathers are readily apparent among the 42 men who participated, so is a much richer context. Many had strong, positive feelings for their children and spoke of multiple frustrations they have encountered in trying to support and care for them. In part, their inability to fulfill their impulses to be responsible fathers is rooted in their own behavior, such as use of alcohol and drugs and multiple, careless sexual entanglements. Other barriers to adequate fathering, however, are rooted in the structure of the labor market, racial discrimination, inadequate urban education, and contradictory, bureaucratic, and insensitive aspects of the child support system itself.

The labor market difficulties of the men interviewed, including unemployment, underemployment, and nonparticipation in the labor force, present policymakers and program designers with both the greatest difficulty and the greatest opportunity. Many of these men, including those with the strongest and weakest employment histories, are barely able to support a family by themselves, even when they are living with their children. When they are separated from their children, and thus called upon to support more than one household, they are often overwhelmed. Given the abundance of paternal feeling expressed in the focus groups, programs that could upgrade the men's employment experiences would seem to have considerable potential for increasing their levels of child support, particularly if employment services are explicitly tied to child support enforcement.

There are broad similarities among the groups from all three communities. Most of the men interviewed from all three places are deeply concerned about issues of fatherhood. They care about their children; they suffer because of separation from them; and they are often bewildered about how to deal with being noncustodial fathers. In addition, they are all in a precarious position in the labor market. Although the white men from Queens have more substantial work histories than their African-American counterparts in Harlem and Brownsville, they are still threatened with being unable to adapt to a changing labor market. They are increasingly unsure of their ability to support not just their children but themselves.

The need for education in the workings of the child support system—how to establish paternity, the resulting benefits for children, how the system works in practice—is also apparent among all the focus groups conducted in New York City. Besides educating the men about the system, there also appears to be a need to educate the system about men such as these. The inflexibility of child support agency responses to their precarious and changing employment situations discourages these men from cooperating with the system.

A final similarity across all these groups is that a substantial proportion of these men have had serious problems with alcohol and substance abuse that have interfered with their ability to support their children and themselves. In the absence of treatment or counseling to deal with these problems where they exist, it is difficult to see how other services such as job training or mediation could be effective.

Beyond these similarities, the men in the Queens, Harlem, and Brownsville groups present distinct demographic profiles that suggest the broad range of circumstances and issues that are likely to be encountered in designing and operating programs for noncustodial fathers. The labor market difficulties of the African-American men are more severe than those of their white counterparts. The African-American men report suffering from racism in the labor market as well as from lack of education and skills. Since several have not had recent, steady work, they also lack the experience that counts strongly with employers of adult men.

Besides having stronger work histories than their peers from Harlem and Brownsville, the Queens men had a higher rate of marriage. Men who have been married have automatically established paternity, thus dispensing with one major barrier to incorporating noncustodial fathers into the child support system. Still, a number of the white men were unmarried and apparently had not established legal paternity. The distance between them and the child support system was entirely comparable to that of their minority peers.

Another factor differentiating the African-American noncustodial fathers interviewed from the white fathers is the economic level of the communities in which they and the mothers of their children live. AFDC enrollment levels are much lower in the working-class, white neighborhoods of Queens than in Brownsville or Harlem. Only two of the white men reported that their children had been on AFDC, and in both cases the duration of enrollment appears to have been fairly brief.

This raises the question of whether programmatic interventions for noncustodial fathers should be driven entirely by the social goal of offsetting AFDC expenditures. In many respects, except for costing taxpayers money, the men whose children were not receiving public assistance appear to be appropriate candidates for programmatic intervention: They have troubled personal histories, they have problems in the labor market, they care for their children, and they often provide support when they can. Their financial and emotional support for their children is profoundly affected by their employment problems, and they have personal and social needs that influence their ability to be effective parents.

The discussion in the Harlem and Brownsville groups of disincentives to marry suggests that combining AFDC and "off the books" employment may be more widespread in communities where employment rates are low and AFDC enrollment levels are high. In such situations, the issue of uncovering "off the books" jobs may be a salient one for programmatic intervention. The men from Harlem and Brownsville were keenly aware that payments to children on AFDC do relatively little to improve the children's welfare. Thus, efforts to explain the $50 "disregard" (money passed through from child support payments by noncustodial parents to custodial parents on AFDC) might help, and expanding the disregard might help even more.

None of these community differences are absolute: Employment, marriage, and AFDC enrollment all vary within as well as across these groups. All these differences, whether within or between groups, present distinctive challenges for programmatic intervention to increase involvement in the child support system. To the extent that programs serve particular communities, however, sensitivity to the specific needs within each community could heighten program effectiveness.

Selected Background Reading for Section II

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III. Daddies and Fathers: Men Who Do for Their Children and Men Who Don't

Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr.

This investigation builds on a longstanding interest in the patterns of family formation of *young* parents, particularly on a 20-year longitudinal study of teenage mothers and their children in Baltimore and a national survey of families, which followed children from early childhood to young adulthood.[1] In both studies, how fathers establish and maintain bonds with their children was a central concern. This background of quantitative research grounds the insights and observations provided here from a select and not necessarily representative set of case studies of young black women and some of their male partners; these women and men all participated in a continuing follow-up study of families in the Baltimore research.[2]

About 60 women who were part of this ongoing follow-up study were approached to participate in focus group interviews for this section of the report. In 1991, these women had children of preschool or primary-school age. Within this relatively homogeneous group, an attempt was made to include families in which the parents displayed different degrees of cooperation in child support and child care.

In the spring of 1991, I conducted a focus group with eight of these 60 women, who spoke at length about their relations with the men who had fathered their children. Most were teenagers when their first child was born. One was married to the father of her children, and two others had close ties to the fathers. The other five had strained relationships with their children's fathers or had stopped seeming them altogether. I followed up the focus groups with extended, individual interviews of four women who had been in the group and three men who were their partners, as well as the fiance of one other woman who had not been able to attend.

The members of the focus group and the partner pairs were all black and in their early twenties. But the women's relationships to their children's fathers differed, as did their educational attainment, employment, economic circumstances, number of children, and current marital status. Their experiences in relating to their children's fathers were quite varied and provide a fairly good indication of the range of experience that young parents have in managing the transition to parenthood. Their accounts suggest how patterns of paternal involvement are affected by cultural standards, economic conditions, family circumstances, and individual differences, all of which have implications for the feasibility of effective child support and programs to promote more active paternal participation in child care.

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[1] On the Baltimore study, see F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., *Unplanned Parenthood: The Social Consequences of Teenage Childbearing* (New York: Free Press, 1976); and F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., J. Brooks-Gunn, and S. P. Morgan, *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). On the national study, see F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., et al., "The Life Course of Children of Divorce: Marital Disruption and Parental Conflict," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983): 656-668; F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., and C. W. Nord, "Parenting Apart: Patterns of Childbearing After Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47 (1985): 893-904; and F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., and K. M. Harris, "When Fathers Matter/Why Fathers Matter: The Impact of Paternal Involvement on the Offspring of Adolescent Mothers," in R. Lerman and T. Ooms, eds., *Young Unwed Fathers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming).

[2] J. Brooks-Gunn and P. L. Chase-Lansdale, "Children Having Children: Effects on the Family System," *Pediatric Annals* 20 (1991).

A word about the veracity of the data: It would be unwise to take the reports of my informants literally. They were certainly aware of the impression they were making in both the group and individual interviews. From time to time, I employed some strategies to jar their efforts at impression management. For example, one young father who presented an ideal statement of his paternal attentions dramatically shifted his account when I asked him what I would overhear if he and his buddies were talking about their children's mothers on the basketball court. I got a knowing smile and a perspective quite different from the one he had been offering up to that point.

But even when I did not use such techniques, I was generally impressed with the openness and sincerity of my informants. After the focus group interview, I learned that five of the eight women who participated had gone home together and continued the conversation in the car. "We kept going on," one informant told me. "We just [kept] talking about–you know–the children's fathers. Some of them are trying to do and some of them are not." Before they left, all the riders exchanged phone numbers and several have been in touch because, as I was told, "all of us are going through the same changes." Similarly, I was struck by how emotionally wrenching the one-on-one interviews were for my informants and me. Several participants thanked me profusely for spending so much time with them. As one young man told me: "I don't find too many people that I can talk to about these sorts of problems." And a woman said: "I was able to get a lot off my chest that I haven't been able to get off–as far as his family and how I really feel about certain things." Then she complained that it was impossible to talk to her friends: "I don't want anybody to tell me what I should do. I just want somebody to listen." Listening, it seems, may be a scarce resource for many of these young people, who seemed to need to articulate complicated and often contradictory feelings about their families, their partners, and their life circumstances.

Because much of the information provided emerged in the course of fairly unstructured conversations, the "data" presented here necessarily take the shape of comments and interchanges. Certain recurrent themes are highlighted. Of course, all the responses were prompted by the kinds of questions I raised, but had I just turned on the tape recorder and listened, I have no doubt that most would have eventually surfaced in their conversations and reflections.

One Case

Angie Tyler had her first child when she was 15. She had not been planning to become pregnant, but she was not too upset when she found out. The child's father, Arnold Green, who was 19, told her that he was willing "to do for the child," to help out with support and child care. Angie's mother was not reassured by Arnold's promises. As Angie described it:

> She wanted to, like every week, keep like going over to [Arnold's family's] house and talk again . . . I guess she was waiting for him to say: "I can't handle it." He said the only person that would have to believe him would be me.

For the next two years after the birth of the child, a daughter, Arnold "did what he said he was going to do." A year after her first birth, Angie became pregnant again. Arnold and his family continued to help out. According to Angie, he did the same for his son as he had for his daughter. But the following year, the relationship became "an on and off again" thing. Arnold's drug and alcohol consumption increased, and he could not be relied upon to support the children.

When Angie became pregnant a third time, Arnold initially denied that the child was his. Angie wanted to get an abortion, but she felt that Arnold undermined her plan. Even though she and her children were now living with Arnold's family, relations between the young couple became extremely strained. Arnold still wanted to "play daddy" in front of his family, but one minute he was "doing for his children" and the next minute he would say: "You the mother. You take care of them." Angie admits that she contributed to the problems she has had with Arnold:

> I mean I'm not going to lie. I did get mean to him. But it didn't mean that I didn't break down the ways and try again . . . until I just got tired or just don't care.

The fighting got worse when Angie developed a new relationship with Ricky Andrews, who became the father of her fourth child. Arnold withdrew even from his family, who were helping to support Angie and the children. Now, five years later, Arnold is still dependent on drugs and alcohol and sees his children very rarely. They know that Arnold is their daddy, but Angie says "he just don't act like it." He hasn't provided any regular economic support for the past three years despite a warrant for his arrest from the child support office.

Ricky Andrews is a different sort of father. By the time they met, Angie and Ricky were both 20 years old. They became good friends before they got sexually involved, but their relationship was never a serious one. When Angie became pregnant, she told Ricky that she was planning to get an abortion. But she changed her mind and decided to keep the child. Having been through so much with Arnold, Angie felt she was better off keeping Ricky at arm's length. She decided not to put his name on the birth certificate and denied she was having his child. Ricky only found out that he was a father when his child was four months old:

> I didn't know about the baby until a friend told me about her. It was like bam! A ton of bricks . . . It was like, why didn't you tell me? That's all I could say . . . I was messed up for a while after that.

Despite the fact that he was already engaged to another woman, Ricky offered to support his daughter and began visiting her regularly. Although Ricky is now married and the father of a second child, his commitment to his older daughter remains undiminished. Despite the fact that he is not legally required to make payments to his first child, Ricky has been a steady provider for three years. When his relationship with Angie became temporarily strained last year, Ricky contacted the Office of Child Support to formalize his support payments. He was told that paternity could only be established by the child's mother, so Ricky dropped his claim. He worries that some day he might be denied access to his child.

There are many fathers like Ricky but, unfortunately, many more who resemble Arnold. Worse yet, there are some who, unlike Arnold, never even set out to meet their paternal responsibilities. No single interpretation emerges from the interviews conducted for this paper to explain why some fathers eschew their responsibilities while others become dedicated dads. The development of paternal responsibility is an open-ended and uncertain process. It is partly determined by the acquisition of certain attitudes and habits in childhood. But the fulfillment of the paternal role also requires a successful negotiation of a difficult series of adult transitions. Without taking full account of the complexity of the process by which paternal responsibility is secured, child support enforcement programs may do little to increase paternal assistance and may even undermine the goal of getting fathers to do their fair share.

"Doing for Your Children"

When Arnold promised Angie that he would "do for his child," she understood what that meant. Among both the women and the men with whom I spoke, there was an unambiguous, universal norm that biological fathers are obligated to support their children. Amy Roberts, one of the women I interviewed, recalled what her child's father told her when she told him she was pregnant. "He said: 'Do whatever you want to do. I'll do what I have to.'" When asked what she understood that to mean, Amy explained:

> That he was going to take care of his daughter. He was going to be the father. Be the man he suppose to be and take care of his responsibilities by taking care of the child . . . That he was going to be there for Nicole when Nicole needed him, and he was going to be there even when she didn't need him . . . take care of her and spend time with her, take her places and everything.

Astoria Exon, a participant in the focus group, described her expectations of the father:

> I guess just being a family . . . To me that's responsible. When the baby needs someone to run to, instead of going to the mother all the time, he can go to his daddy.

The other members of the focus group strongly concurred that being a father involved more than just paying money. It involved sharing the child care responsibility. A number agreed with Chelsea Terrell that men should do their fair share of child-rearing: "Sometimes, the money to me is not even an issue. The quality time means a lot more to a child than the money." This comment prompted a chorus of agreement and the following exchange of views:

> Sometimes when we can't do, they should be able to do—you know.
>
> Just being there when it's time to go to bed. You sit by the bedside and read a book to her.
>
> Or a phone call before she goes to bed.
>
> I agree with her—what she was saying. The money doesn't mean a thing to the kids because they know that they always will get it from either grandparents or the mother. I wouldn't care if he didn't give him nothing, but if he was to spend more time with him, take him to movies, take him to the carnivals, fairs . . . I would have paid child support if he would just spend a little more time with the children.

These strongly worded statements suggest that women clearly give a higher priority to emotional than material support from men. However, most of the women also complained about the father's failure to help out financially. Their comments testify to the strength of their feelings about the importance of fathers sharing child care as part of their paternal obligation. Certainly, financial help is only part of what is involved in "doing for the children."

In conversations with some of the male partners of the women in the group, most fathers appeared to hold similar values. Jordon Jones, the father of Amy Roberts' child, explained that he wants to be a good father to Nicole. What does that involve? "Me taking care of Nicole. Me spending time with Nicole. Me buying her clothes and what else she needs." Later I asked Jordon, who sees his daughter only rarely, what he wants to have happen in the next few years:

> I look at it like this. In the next couple of years I have a nice job, making money, and I be seeing my kids [Jordon has two other children by another woman]. I be seeing my daughter on the weekends or something like that. Or when she start school this year, picking her up from school and taking her home.

Jordon paused and acknowledged, without my ever asking, that his hopes are unlikely to come true. While recognizing the importance of emotional care, the men put greater emphasis on their ability—or inability—to provide steady economic support. Women may accept that a man can "do for his child" without providing regular assistance, but the men seemed to doubt that their emotional relationship with their children could be fully credited unless it was backed up by material assistance. Men were inclined to view their failure to supply financial help as the more egregious violation of their paternal duties. Ricky Andrews, who has been an exemplary provider, spoke with contempt of fathers who don't do for their children: "[Men] who just make the babies and are not willing to pay are just dummies." Then Ricky went on to draw a distinction between those men who just father children and the daddies who actually care for them.

Almost everyone I spoke to—men and women alike—recognized the cultural difference between a father and a daddy. Fathers were generally described as the person who made the child and daddies as the person (whether the biological progenitor or someone else) who took care of him or her. (Some members of the group made a similar distinction but reversed the terms, reserving the term "father" for men who assume full responsibility for their children.) Ricky, for example, reported that his cousin's child approached him one day and said: "Don't tell my mother, but could you be my daddy?" "I was lost for a second," Ricky reported. "It was kind of deep." He told the child that it would be all right for her to call him daddy. But he said that he is not really doing for her what daddies are expected to do: "It doesn't bother me," he says, "because their father's not there."

Assessing a similar situation, Beebee Evers, another member of the focus group, suggested that "if they [fathers] was there, they [their children] would know the difference. That's the big problem."

Techniques of Neutralization

Among the informants for this investigation, there was little disagreement on what men should do for their children, but, not surprisingly, explanations differed for why and how it happens that men relinquish or reduce their paternal role. Men who were uninvolved with their children were reluctant to acknowledge it openly; instead, they explained their noncompliance by what Sykes and Matza referred to as "techniques of neutralization," socially patterned accounts for justifying why it was necessary or acceptable to disengage from the widely accepted norms of paternity.[3] This does not mean that the explanations offered by the males had no validity. But, justifiable or not, they represent cultural contrivances for avoiding blame or moral responsibility.

"It's not my child."

Everyone I spoke to agreed that fathers are only responsible for children when they are the child's progenitor. (Becoming a social daddy is appreciated and widely practiced but not required even when marriage or cohabitation occurs.) Therefore, men may absolve themselves of responsibility if they are convinced and are able to convince others that they are not the biological father. In the Baltimore study, a fifth of the males reported that a sexual partner had said they were responsible for a pregnancy that they did not acknowledge. Of course, not all these pregnancies were brought to term, but contested fatherhood is hardly a rare event. It was an issue for several of the parents I interviewed.

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[3] G. M. Sykes and D. Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," *American Sociological Review* 22 (1957): 664-673.

"Someone else has taken my place."

Although not as socially compelling, men sometimes justify their low paternal commitment by claiming that they have been pushed out. Jordon explained that he had been displaced by Amy's fiance, who was taking over his legitimate role. Although he acknowledged that he had not been doing enough for his child, he felt he was not being given a chance to show what he could do.

"My support isn't going for the child."

Men sometimes claim that their payments are not benefiting their children because they are diverted by their children's mother or other members of the household. They complained that women are "materialistic" and constantly looking for ways of getting money from them. The fathers' feelings of distrust could be summed up in the sentiment: "They always be asking for money for themselves, not they kids."

"I don't have the money."

The most frequent reason for nonsupport, according to the fathers who are not paying, is that they do not have the funds. Unstable employment contributes to the male's sense that he cannot be expected to provide regular support. I was told by men that they help out when they can, but that they often simply do not have the funds. Also, many fathers have children by more than one mother and face a constant barrage of requests for help. "Sometimes me and my buddies get together," Jordon told me, "and we be like say why do we have so many kids? And it's hard."

"She don't let me see my child."

Nonsupport and inconsistent fathering often produce a spiral of conflict between the parents, which leads fathers to believe that they are "locked out" of their children's lives. Indeed, many of the mothers reported that they did not trust the father to be with the child. Males may then justify their nonsupport by saying that they are being deprived of their paternal rights and that women have a "nasty attitude" toward them.

Women's Views of Men's Accounts of Why They Don't Help Out

The females I spoke to were well versed in these techniques of neutralization, which they generally regarded as cynical evasions or lame excuses for why fathers don't do for their children. The women had a different set of accounts for why men withdraw from their children, which emanated from a powerful set of beliefs about why men cannot be trusted.

"Men are spoiled."

The notion that less is expected from men was a recurrent theme in the focus group and the individual interviews. Many of the women complained that, from childhood, boys are treated with more indulgence than girls. They are taught to be irresponsible, I was told. Beebee Landreau, who was engaged to be married to the father of her child, described her fiance with some fondness and some exasperation: "He still acts like a baby. I mean like another one of my children." Someone else volunteered: "I think that's all men." Heads nodded in agreement around the table.

"Men can't accept the responsibilities of parenthood."

Closely related to the belief that most men were not as self-sacrificing as women was the view that they were unwilling to forgo their own pleasures for their children. Not everyone I spoke to subscribed to this blanket condemnation of men, but the idea that men are more selfish than women was generally accepted. Wanda Miller complained that Lionnel, her child's father, was unwilling to part with his money. "I don't have to do this," Lionnel would tell her when she asked him for money to buy the child Pampers. He would say that he was doing the best he could. "He really wasn't," Wanda continued. "He wasn't even trying to. He's just made a kid, and he's a father. That was it." Most women I spoke to agreed with Wanda that men could not be relied upon to do their fair share. Lydia Robinson told the focus group: "Jason's father, you know, he's not stupid–nothing like that. He just lazy. He just doesn't want to do it."

"Men aren't ready to become fathers."

Most women felt that they had become parents too soon. But they were even more convinced that the fathers of their children became parents before they were ready. Unlike the men, who were more inclined to view their unemployment as caused by the unavailability of work, women stressed the men's unwillingness and inability to hold jobs once they found them. If pushed hard, women acknowledged that poor jobs played a part in men's reluctance to accept employment, but they pointed out that they were expected to hold jobs that their boyfriends considered to be unacceptable.

Gender Mistrust

Suspicion of men's motives and their capacities to undertake parenthood led many of the women to discount, and perhaps sometimes to distort, men's efforts to remain involved in their children's lives. The sharp division in the accounts of men and women is a vivid expression of the profound gender mistrust that pervades the cultural setting in which these young people are growing up.

Most had seen their fathers retreat from their family and had been raised predominantly by women. To be sure, almost all were exposed to models of reliable and trustworthy males, but the women complained that these men were in short supply. The men, in turn, were laboring, frequently unsuccessfully, to demonstrate that they could do better for their children than their fathers had done for them. The differing accounts offered by men and women of why fathers withdraw provide a complex cultural script that is played out during the transition to parenthood. Men and women exchange promises, promises are often broken, and then blame is apportioned for the unkept promises.

There is another side to this gloomy scenario of distrust and failure. Almost everyone I spoke to, men and women alike, operated with a dual script. If they were equipped to accept failure, it did not mean that they did not retain the hope—even the expectation—that they might succeed in creating a successful relationship and a stable family. All shared the ideal of establishing a marriage-like relationship, if not a marriage, and raising children with their partner. For some this represented a distant and perhaps elusive goal; for others it was close to being realized. One man and woman I interviewed had plans to marry. Another woman was already wed. Two other parents had managed to establish a cordial, or at least workable, relationship.

Preparation for Parenthood

What are the circumstances that may contribute to a successful accommodation to early parenthood? An adequate explanation must take account of the personal attributes and situation of *both* parents and their respective families. Obviously my information is often incomplete or, sometimes, seen from the eyes of only one party. But a closer look at the different perspectives of men and women suggests how they create a dynamic that leads to successful collaboration or, more frequently, disengagement.

When Amy became pregnant, she and Jordon had been going together for just three months. She told me that she became pregnant the first time the couple had sex. "And a couple of weeks later—after we broke up—I told [Jordon] I was pregnant." Jordon, who already had two children, reported his recollection of the conversation in which Amy informed him that she was pregnant: "I told her to get an abortion. But she didn't." Amy remembered it differently. According to her, Jordon promised to "do what he had to do." Possibly each recalled a different part of the conversation or perhaps merely what they wanted to say or hear.

None of the couples I spoke to had planned to become pregnant, nor had any other women in the focus group intended to have their child when they did. Each described her pregnancy as an accident, even though several women were not especially upset to learn that they were pregnant. Two other women besides Amy stated that they had become pregnant the first time they had sex with their child's father. While most women had been going with the father before the pregnancy occurred, several, like Amy, were in the process of breaking up when they became pregnant. In several instances, either the initiation of sex or the occurrence of pregnancy contributed to the demise of the relationship.

Because I was speaking to women whose first birth occurred in their teen years, it is not surprising to observe that emotional and sexual relations were short-lived and fragile. Weak investment in the relationship prior to pregnancy makes it very difficult to establish a strong commitment to parental cooperation following the birth. Jordon, after promising to "do for his child," disappeared for eight months, only reappearing after his daughter was born. He was not the only father—as we learn from the women in the focus group—to break off relations during pregnancy, and not the only one to return after a period of prolonged absence.

> Beebee: Most of them stop visiting once they found out the girl was pregnant.
>
> Amy: Yeah.
>
> Beebee: That's how most of them are. I mean they get scared away.
>
> Chelsea: That's the responsibility of the father.
>
> Beebee: Yeah. They got to grow up.
>
> Chelsea: Even when they're older, some of them—not even the younger [fathers]—they're scared.

In answer to my question: "Why are they scared of the responsibility?"

> Chelsea: I guess failing, maybe failing the child or not standing up to the mother's standards or something. It takes too much for them.
>
> Amy: Not being able to—when the child come to you specifically and ask for something—they scared because they might not be able to get it to them at that particular time.
>
> Angie: He wasn't scared. He just spoiled and he always had everything his way [by his mother] . . . I guess his child's mother is supposed to do it so he's not afraid of anything.

This discussion turned to a series of observations and illustrations about how men are spoiled by their mothers, how selfish they are, and how ill-prepared they are for the responsibilities of parenthood.

The women in the group varied in their explanations for why men often withdrew during the women's pregnancy. Fear of failure, immaturity, and self-indulgence were all mentioned. These explanations are not as different as they might seem at first blush. All may have a common root in the socialization experiences of many young men in urban ghettos. Lionnel recalled how his father disappeared shortly after he was born. He told me that he "wants to be there for his son." But, according to Wanda, Lionnel has virtually stopped seeing the boy and has never paid child support. Wanda blames Lionnel's inability to make good on his intentions on his family history, though her account is characteristically bitter:

> He was the only child for a long time and he was raised by his mother by herself. And he always talked about his father all the time. So, when Lionnel, Jr., was born, he always talked about what he was going to do for him. Things his father didn't do for him. He turned out and did just the same as far as his kids. He's not around for them.

Wanda observed—perhaps speaking both for Lionnel and herself—that he's "got a lot of bitterness in him." She commented afterwards that she should have known what to expect because her father behaved the same toward her and her brothers.

I asked Jordon, who is a lot like Lionnel, about his friends who have become fathers. He replied: "All my friends—well, not all of them—are basically struggling like I am." He then explained how his friends really are not able to command any respect from their children. They "ain't brought up with manners and discipline." Both he and Lionnel seem to be caught in a pattern of reproducing the circumstances of their own childhood.

Based on the small number of interviews I conducted, it is presumptuous to speak of regularities in the results. Nonetheless, I was struck by the contrasts in the family experience of the two men I interviewed who were assuming responsibility for their children. Ricky, who had to overcome Angie's persistent doubts about his willingness to care for his child, described how, after a series of tests of his resolve, he finally convinced her that his daughter was his first priority. Ricky acknowledged that he feels more strongly than men who are only there for their children sometimes and who care for them only to "ease their conscience or look good in public." I asked Ricky why he is different from these other guys: "I don't know. Maybe I believe in . . . it's my blood. When the child started calling me 'daddy' . . . God! Pretty special."

I then asked Ricky whether he had been frightened by the responsibility. He acknowledged that many guys cannot handle the responsibility:

> It's like anything else. If you owning a car, you are responsible for paying for it. If you living alone, you responsible for paying for it. If you work, you responsible for showing up and doing your job. So why can't you be responsible for taking care of your child?

I pressed Ricky, pointing out that children require lots of money. "I don't really care for money. I only work because I have to." If you dislike working so much, I asked him, why not let the child be supported by the child's mother or her family? Ricky admits that he knows guys who do that, but he does not "want somebody else . . . to take my weight."

How did he come to hold those views? Ricky described how his mother died when he was 12 and he was taken in by a brother, who was 18 years older than him:

> He would work and go home, work and go home. Get to me where I don't want him to have to take care of me . . . seeing him give and give and give.

Ricky started working with his brother to help pay the bills and got in the habit of sharing the responsibility. "I guess," he reflects, as if he had never thought about it before, "it was being around a give-type person. A person that took care and was responsible–set some kind of example for me."

Ricky was not the only father I talked to who had acquired a strong sense of "procreative consciousness and responsibility"–the term used by Phillips Cutright to describe the deep commitment to caring for one's children.[4] Vernon Wood is engaged to Tami McDonald, who did not participate in the focus group because she could not take time off from work. Vernon and Tami had been "friends" for almost five years before Tami became pregnant. According to Vernon, the pregnancy was a "misplanned accident," but the timing did not make much difference to either of them. He was working at the time, but having a child "slowed things down" in his plans to live together with Tami. He contributes "automatically." By this he means that he pays regularly, though, like Ricky, he pays informally–that is, directly to the mother rather than through the Office of Child Support. "I just know what he needs . . . If I can afford it, I get it." Most of Vernon's close friends who have children feel the same way.

I asked Vernon about how he came to feel so strongly about supporting his child. "It really has to start from home . . . Some parents just don't care." When I pushed him on the influences in his life, he jokingly replied:

> What do you say? Mama's boy. Whatever people want to say. My mother just looked after me. She looked after her kids . . . My mother was always there, you know. Do your work, do your work . . . Most kids don't respect their parents. In other words, they can't look at their parents as role models 'cause they not nothing themselves.

The conversation turned to the way most children are being raised in Vernon's neighborhood. Vernon complained that many children are not being taken care of–even by their mothers.

Ricky and Vernon see themselves as different from many of the people in their neighborhood. Ricky reported that he is one of the few young men who work at a regular job in his community, though he thinks others are beginning to feel they might be better off if they found steady employment. While neither of these young men is self-righteous about his life choices, it is clear that they believe many of their peers are not raised to take responsibility for themselves and therefore cannot assume responsibility for their children.

In fact, the fathers who do for their children and the fathers who don't offer similar accounts of why some men are good providers. I asked Jordon, whose behavior departs from his own expressed ideals, to tell me what I would hear if I were to listen to him and his friends talk about caring for their children. Jordon began a short and expressive monologue of what happens when girl-friends ask guys to buy Pampers for their children. (Pampers figure heavily in the conversations of both men and women because they are both concrete and emblematic expressions of men's willingness to meet the daily requirements of child care.)

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[4] P. Cutright, "Child Support and Responsible Male Procreative Behavior," *Sociological Focus* 19 (1986): 27-45. See also W. Marsiglio, "Commitment to Social Fatherhood: Predicting Adolescent Males' Intentions to Live with Their Child and Partner," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 50 (1988): 427-441.

> Sometimes me and my buddies get together and we be saying: "I, like, well, *you* go buy them because I ain't buying those Pampers. I done that plenty of times." [Pause] I used to be like that for a while until I really sat down by myself and ask what I accomplish out of life—which was making babies. That is all I got.

Jordon then told me of his plans to get a job or perhaps try to go into the service so his kids would be taken care of by the government: "[Then] I won't have to worry about that [whether they will be well provided for]."

Jordon has held a number of different jobs over the past several years, though none of them have worked out. Amy had her own explanation for Jordon's unstable work history. She said that every time Jordon's employer is told that he owes child support, he quits. "Jordon won't keep a job for more than three months. As soon as they find out, he's gone."

The failure of men to support their children can no doubt be traced to structural sources rooted in racial discrimination, labor market conditions, and economic deprivation. But few of the young people to whom I spoke—even the unemployed males—dwelled on these more distant sources of their difficulties. They were more inclined to subscribe to the strong belief that the men who make the children should also care for them. Jordon condemned his buddies' behavior just as Wanda condemned his.

Like Ricky and Vernon, Wanda and Jordon believe that men do not take responsibility because they are not brought up with the expectation that they must take care of themselves. Wanda complained that her mother is training her brothers that way:

> They sleep all day long and stay out all night long. Fifty and $100 tennis shoes—my mother give them the money to sit around at home. I wasn't brought up that way.

There was a general consensus—among men and women, good and poor providers alike—that many fathers enter parenthood untrained and ill-prepared. Limited exposure to appropriate role models, and failure to acquire attitudes and habits that lead young men to take demanding and often unrewarding jobs, was usually cited when the men and women I spoke to talked about men being ill-prepared for parenthood. Many informants spoke of the need of males "to get the running out of them" before they are ready to settle down. Whether women had similar needs was the subject of some disagreement. Most felt that women's family experiences were more conducive to training them for responsibility, though they conceded that they were "forced to learn on the job."

Weak Ties and Unstable Bonds: Relations Between Parents

Young parents often enter parenthood uncertain about their commitment to one another. As time goes on, their self-doubts frequently grow with the experience of trying to raise a child together. But even in the small number of cases that I observed, tremendous variability existed in the commitment to trying to work out relations. At one end of the continuum are cases where parental obligations are contested from conception; at the other end are couples who are able to negotiate a stable and friendly relationship or those who pursue the traditional path of marriage. Most fall in between these two extremes: Their ability to be cooperative wavers as their relationship fluctuates. Typically, though not invariably, waning emotional ties between parents signal their inability to share parental duties.

Contested Parenthood

Paternity carries an unambiguous claim for support, I was told, but I also learned that establishing paternity was sometimes far from automatic. Angie was able to persuade Ricky that he was the child's biological father, even after she had given the child another father's name. But Chelsea Terrell was still trying to convince the family of the man she said was the father of her child. Despite his protestations to the contrary, they were convinced he was not responsible for the pregnancy and hence not obliged to support her child.

The informants who participated in this study no doubt underrepresented the incidence of contested paternity. Legal paternity had been established for all participants in the focus group, but even so, two members had come close to getting a "blood test." While this procedure is considered by child support officials to be a standard protection in contested paternity cases, I got the impression that requesting evidence of paternity in this way conveys the ultimate absence of trust, making cooperation thereafter difficult. It is far better to come to a private agreement based on less intrusive methods, most notably familial resemblance.

Chelsea Terrell recalls that her baby's father initially doubted paternity: "He asked me would I get a blood test. So after I had the baby, we was supposed to have got the blood test, but he saw that she looks just like him, as they say." Beebee Evers reports an almost identical experience to Chelsea's. As in the case of Chelsea, the father's family refused to acknowledge his responsibility and insisted on a blood test. "And then we finally got together and we talked it out. He looked at my son [and said]: 'He look just like me.'" The father's paternity was not completely resolved for other members of his family until a medical examination several years later revealed that the child needed glasses. The father, too, had poor eyesight and had required glasses as a young child. Because cooperation between parents requires establishing and building trust, the paternity test can be thought of as a "last resort" measure. It is only employed when the likely conditions for support are lacking altogether. Paradoxically, the establishment of paternity by a blood test may be associated with noncompliance with child support or low paternal involvement.

Paternity as a Package Deal

Most fathers do pledge paternal support and involvement. At the time of pregnancy and in the year or so after the child is born, caretaking is usually at a high point. Disengagement often takes place over time, not infrequently even after the parents have lived together or had subsequent children, as occurred with Angie and Arnold. A primary reason for their declining commitment can be traced to the vicissitudes of the young couple's emotional relationship. With formerly married men, retreat from their children often occurs because marriage is regarded as a "package deal"—that is, obligations to support their children are indirectly mediated by emotional ties to the child's mother.[5] It is almost as if many fathers saw their child care responsibilities as part of an umbrella contract with their children's mother. This same sort of understanding seems to apply as well to men who never marry their child's mother.

Amy complained that Jordon was only willing to support the kids as long as they were emotionally involved. She acknowledged that Jordon was taking care of Nicole until "I told him that the feelings that I had for him at first weren't there any more—I wasn't in love with him." Amy reported that Jordon told her: "How do you expect me to take care of Nicole if we are not together?" She said: "You can still take care of Nicole. You just don't have to be with me to do it." According to her, Jordon replied: "I'm not going to do for one if I ain't going to do for two if I can't be with you both." Though Amy was able to get Jordon to agree to child support, he made only one payment after they stopped seeing each other. My subsequent interview with Jordon largely corroborated Amy's account that his commitment to supporting his child was linked to his bond with Amy. Jordon is still hurt that Amy broke up with him and is confused about his obligations to Nicole now that his former girlfriend is about to marry someone else. He now thinks that Amy gets in the way between him and his daughter, but he also adds that he has "no hard feelings against Amy. She just don't care for me."

Several other women complained that their decision to get out of a relationship with their child's father ultimately provoked his withdrawal from paternal responsibilities. When Angie became pregnant with her third child, Arnold told his family that the child was not his because by that time "me and him was on and off." As soon as their relationship ended, "he was knocking his responsibility already in one day." When I asked Angie how Arnold would explain why he pulled away from his kids, she said that he would say she didn't care about him. And Wanda recalls that when she separated because she "couldn't take it anymore," her child's father immediately stopped seeing her son. "It was like he was going to punish me" for "not being with him." Fulfillment of paternal responsibilities is seen by some men as a *quid pro quo* for continuing an emotional relationship that involves caring for them as well.

I asked the couples who were managing to cooperate whether the father would maintain involvement if their relationship soured. The responses were mixed. One believed that their ties were not contingent on an ability to get along with each other; the others felt that if trust broke down between them, they were uncertain how it might affect their capacity to cooperate in child-rearing. Ricky was one of those who feared that if he didn't remain "friendly" with Angie, she might make it difficult for him to continue to see his child. His comments highlighted the fact that women, too, adopt umbrella contracts. They are also capable of obstructing relations between fathers and their children when their emotional loyalties to their former partners wane.

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[5] F. F. Furstenberg, Jr., and A. J. Cherlin, *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Entangling Relationships

Young relationships are often short-lived. All but two of the women I spoke to were no longer emotionally involved with the fathers of their child, though several continued friendships with them. The succession of relationships has important implications for a couple's pattern of collaboration in much the same way that remarriage affects the patterns of involvement of formerly married couples.[6] Although no disagreement exists that biological parents retain responsibility for their children, in reality allowances are made when other men take on the role of social parent. Even though everyone interviewed subscribed to a belief that obligations endure, many appeared to discount or readjust their sense of what should actually happen when another man is living with the children.

Amy's impending marriage complicated Jordon's already tenuous relationship to his daughter. He complained that he was being displaced by another man. At first, Jordon made a renewed commitment to become reconnected to his child, especially after he heard Nicole refer to Amy's fiance as "daddy." Amy did not deny that her fiance, who treats Nicole "as a real father should," is displacing Jordon. And Jordon admitted that when Amy called his household to say that Nicole needed something, his mother kept encouraging him to "let her new boyfriend get it." Now that Amy has stopped calling, he told me: "It has me wondering." Jordon explained that he feels conflicted over his obligations.

Jordon is not alone. Shifting relationships are a major source of attenuation in child support and involvement for a number of the informants. Women give up on the child's father and place their hopes in their new partner, who usually expresses a willingness to assume care for any children residing in her household. Because relations with former partners are usually strained, it is generally easier for women to accept the father's departure as the price of keeping conflict low. Wanda explained to me:

> I would like her to know who her father is, but sometime when I think about it, I don't want her to know. Just because of the type of person he is . . . The guy I'm with now makes Lionnel look real small.

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[6] See Furstenberg and Nord, "Parenting Apart."

So the politics of current domestic arrangements undermine a commitment to recognized moral and legal commitments. Biological fathers' longstanding obligations are, in effect, written off as "bad debts" by women who see their present partners as potentially more reliable providers. Biological fathers should pay, but getting them to comply is often viewed as more trouble than it is worth.

Men, in turn, are inclined to see their present relationships as more emotionally compelling. Given limited emotional and material resources, they must make a difficult choice between preserving ties with their biological children and forging relations with a new family. Over time, then, the fathers' obligations often come to be discounted by both them and the mothers of their children.

Obligation Overload

To make a bad situation even worse, some men like Arnold or Jordon, who have limited resources to begin with, accumulate crushing obligations early in life. At 23, Jordon, who is only occasionally employed, has three children to support. Angie stated that Arnold cannot be located, even by the Office of Child Support, but Angie reported that he has no fewer than four children. Most men who father children early in life are not as overburdened as Jordon or Arnold, but a relatively small number of men with a large number of obligations do present a special problem to women and the child support system.

Is it worth trying to collect from these overtaxed and unreliable sources? Wanda told me that she never really pressed Lionnel to pay child support: "I really never pushed the issue about it because he wasn't going to do it anyway." Wanda recalled with a trace of bitterness that Lionnel went down to the Office of Child Support and told them that he could not pay for either of his children. He was told that eventually he would have to start paying, but nothing ever happened. Like other women I spoke to in Wanda's circumstances, she has given up on the father, written him off as a "bad debt."

The contrast to the men who were providing regular support for their children was again striking. Not only did all of them have steady employment, but they also had been able to restrict and carefully manage the demands made upon them. Vernon had only one child and had waited for eight years before getting married. Speaking of why he had waited so long to get married, he told me that sometimes it was depressing to realize that "you can't just decide that you can do whatever you want." But "I just didn't want to go into it not having enough money." Vernon expects that maybe he and Tami will have just one more child.

The fathers who are able to do for their children are exceptionally good at managing their limited resources. They are often receiving help from their families, who frequently share and reinforce their strong responsibility ethic. But it also seems clear that some of these young couples are leading a precarious existence, given the high demands and relatively meager resources available to them. Their resolve to manage is impressive, but it is evident that their reserves could be overdrawn if a crisis were to occur. For example, how steadfast will

Ricky's commitments to supporting his daughter be when the costs of his second family grow? Ricky is already working two jobs to provide enough support.

The inability to accumulate resources, of course, is linked to the limited economic prospects available to all of the families in this study. The men who were managing had done so in part by avoiding excessive family demands. Most of the men who were not managing had by an early age become impossibly overloaded with claims that they could not honor. For several of these men, employment only reminds them of their unmet obligations. If Vernon sometimes feels depressed about his prospects, it is hard to describe the despair that Jordon and Lionnel feel. At the end of his interview, I asked Jordon what could be done to help fathers like him. He started telling me about a friend of his, Roy, who as he went on became a surrogate for himself:

> When his first kid was born, Roy was all about that kid. But as he just constantly was messing with other girls besides his main girl, they pop up pregnant every time. Right now, he's tired of this girl's nagging about the kids. Roy's like me, he wants to do the right thing. He wants to be with his kids. He wants to have a nice home and have his kids stay. He can't get out of the neighborhood that he is in. If he try, somebody will pull him back in.

Impressions of the Child Support System

Most of the people I spoke to felt that the Office of Child Support was more a part of the problem than of the solution. There was no one who had not had at least some contact with the Office of Child Support, which the residents of Baltimore City referred to simply as "downtown." While everyone I spoke to endorsed the principle of child support, they were generally disgusted with the way the current system operates. In the focus group, Beebee Evers seemed to sum up the feelings of everyone around the table when she declared: "The system sucks . . . It really does because . . . the guys go down there and still don't pay anything." Her comment prompted a round of complaints about downtown.

"Everything gets lost in the mail."

The most frequent criticism of child support was that the system does not work. After a round of disparaging comments in the focus group about the way things work downtown, I remarked: "I hear a lot of you saying you don't have much faith in the system here." The responses were similar:

> Angie: Not at all.
>
> Amy: That's no joke.
>
> Lydia: "We mailed it off two weeks ago."
>
> Amy: "You should have had it, and I don't know what happened."

> Lydia: And then when they lose a check, and you got to go down there and look through all these checks . . . I don't know how many checks that I haven't received.

Complaints about the inefficiency of the system were rampant. In both the focus group and interviews, I was regaled with stories about the system's inability to collect payments. Beebee describes the former partner of one of her friends:

> Now he works for the city. Why can't they just snatch him up real quick and fast? I don't think that they are doing anything about it. I really don't.

Candy Jeffries, another member of the group, explained that the system makes it impossible to file a claim. "It is messed up now" because of the lack of personnel. "You tell them your complaint, and they'll mail it back. You don't even get to talk to nobody." Amy Roberts added:

> I called down to the building. They gave me a number, an ID number. And I'm like—what am I going to do with this? What is it for?

Beebee asked her if she wrote them a letter. And Amy replied sardonically: "Yeah, write them a letter. My mother did that. She was like—don't do it. You're not going to get any justice." Amy says that she ignored her mother's advice and wrote to the system. Six months later nothing had happened. "And I know he works . . . He owes it to my child. But like you said, the system sucks because they are not doing anything."

"They give up on the fathers that don't pay."

As the comments above indicate, most women thought that the system was not really interested in pursuing the men who held out. Other women bitterly protested that men who defied the system generally got away with it. Several reported that attempts to garnish their child's father's wages only backfired. They claimed the men responded by quitting their jobs when they were told that they would have to pay back child support. In the focus group, the women reported that the child support system succeeded in scaring the men, but there was little follow through. "Don't scare them," Amy said, "do it. The only way that it would probably have helped Jordon is just stop scaring him, just throw him in jail, period." She wanted downtown to be tougher. A few other women shared her view that if the system were tougher, there might be more compliance.

Others in the group had their doubts that tougher enforcement was possible or even that it would be a deterrent in their families. Wanda, for example, claimed that Lionnel would just defy attempts at getting tough. In any event, even if he were thrown in jail, it would not help her kids. It seemed that some women despaired of getting any cooperation from resistant fathers who had little to lose by refusing to comply.

And the men I spoke to—both those who paid and those who did not—were not any more sanguine about getting the system to operate more effectively. Some favored tougher sanctions. Others thought that approach would not work. But almost all agreed that the system was too impersonal to be responsive to people's needs. Ricky, with a mixture of concern and scorn, described how he had been discouraged from paying child support by the bureaucratic rules. He, like other fathers, preferred to pay child support directly or "under the table," believing that the money was more likely to reach his children. The practice of paying outside the system was common. Vernon told me that he simply took care of his child's expenses without a formal agreement.

"The money doesn't get to the children, anyway."

Ricky's view that paying into the system often does not work to the child's benefit was held by other informants. Several women who had received cash assistance described how child support payments were used to pay back the welfare system:

> They sent me a letter [and] told me that they would continue on taking his taxes until the full amount [for back assistance] is paid up.

This procedure of linking child support to the repayment of welfare had the effect of making both the father and mother feel that the money that came into the system was not going to support their children. For some men, this was a further excuse to evade payments; for some women, the low payoff from the system discouraged them from cooperating in efforts to locate the father. For both men and women, it reinforced the impression that downtown was more of an interference than a source of assistance. They were convinced that the system was not designed to help them out.

Misinformation

Negative attitudes about the child support system evidently were mixed with some misinformation about how the system should work. Some women on public assistance were aware of the pass-through procedure, by which a mother receives the first $50 per month of a father's child support payments and the rest goes to repay the state for the family's welfare benefits. However, such knowledge did not seem to carry much weight with them or with the fathers. Several informants were confused about the linkage between child support and welfare. The belief that the child support system seemed to be largely designed to collect for previous public assistance payments undermined its legitimacy in the eyes of a number of the people I spoke to.

Implications for Policy and Parents' Fair Share

The focus group and individual interviews with young parents reported here offer both some reasons to hope that an intervention such as Parents' Fair Share can make a difference in their children's lives and reasons to be cautious. While employment training and job placement will help some young fathers, others are not likely to respond to simple economic inducements. Many of these young fathers have been in and out of employment; they have not found the experience sufficiently rewarding to settle into a regular job. Many do not have the skills, maturity, or determination to adhere to a routine that will make them steady providers and good prospects as partners to their children's mothers. In time, some of these men will "get the running out of them" and probably become more reliable partners, but others are likely to lead a transient existence unless their lives take a dramatic turn.

Clearly, there is a sobering message in what the women (and several of the men) have said: Attempts at involving some of the fathers are likely to meet with frustration. I experienced some of this frustration as I tried to recruit male informants to participate in the case studies. I had no trouble locating fathers who were involved in their children's upbringing. But despite the fact that I was offering large financial incentives for an interview, I had limited success in reaching some of the fathers whose contact with their children was episodic, even when the mothers supplied names and telephone numbers. One of the men I reached denied he was the father.

It is also clear from these retrospective accounts that most couples would have been better off if the pregnancy had not occurred when it did. Virtually every young parent I talked to–even those who were successfully managing their parental responsibilities–stated that in retrospect they should have postponed their first birth. When I asked the focus group what measures could help young men, several of the participants thought that more programs for males in the schools would be helpful: "They've got a lot for the females but not for the males."

Much more can be done than is being done to disabuse young men and women of the romantic illusion associated with establishing a family early in life. While parenthood was rarely intended, both young mothers and fathers deceived themselves and each other by fostering wildly excessive expectations, while at the same time harboring secret doubts and fears. It is important to continue to spread the message that men do not make children they cannot care for. It would be useful to provide assistance to young couples at the time a pregnancy is first discovered so that they can enter into a more realistic dialogue. The case studies revealed that what little is communicated between couples is frequently misconstrued and distorted. It is also evident that pregnancy sometimes precipitates a panic reaction on the part of men. Hearing that they are about to become fathers, males not infrequently flee their imminent responsibilities, leaving bewildered mothers and scornful families to pick up the pieces.

Young fathers have internalized a double script. They want to do better for their children than their fathers did for them, but they also have learned to fear (perhaps even expect) failure in fatherhood. Support, encouragement, advice, and assistance are sorely needed for young men who justly have doubts about their capacity to assume paternal responsibilities. Similarly, women who sense the fathers' doubts may be helped to understand rather than react to men's fears. Many couples, it seems, participate unwittingly in a dialogue that recapitulates family histories and reinforces gender expectations.

As Jordon spoke about what would help the people he knew, he wanted services for young fathers like himself that would help them learn "how to play that role." He admitted that many fathers would not participate at first. But eventually such a father would come out to the meetings and "feel better about himself and think about what he is doing wrong and what he need do." I sensed in Jordon a desperate need to gain confidence about his ability to provide for his children. Certainly, part of gaining that confidence involves finding steady employment, but Jordon's erratic work patterns also reflect his wavering commitments to participating in the world of work.

Another pressing need is to work with young people both before and after they become parents to learn to overcome the powerful feelings of distrust they feel for members of the opposite sex. These interviews illustrate attitudes and beliefs that are deeply embedded in recurrent historical circumstances and reinforced by current realities, portraying most men as irresponsible, immature, and selfish, and women as demanding, discontented, and long-suffering.

Beebee Evers told me that she is often asked why she and Harold have not become enemies after all they have been through. They were so different when they first met eight years ago. Beebee was brought up by her mother "not to depend on a man . . . because he could leave you today or tomorrow." At one time, she threatened to leave Harold because "he was so lazy." Beebee says she pushed him into growing up: "He saw I was working two jobs plus taking care of the kids and keeping the house clean and everything." Then she reflects: "We grew up with each other. It's just we was there for each other when we needed to be." Cases such as Beebee and Harold need greater visibility in a world where many men and women doubt their ability to create lasting partnerships.

Problems in sustaining or dissolving emotional relations between parents are a central concern. The transition to parenthood is often occurring among expectant parents who barely know one another. While it is difficult to get previously married couples to collaborate, it is even more difficult to work out patterns of cooperation among adolescents and young adults who have limited skills and experience getting along with one another, and who may still be involved in attaining independence from their respective families. Mediation and counseling services are much needed to help young couples work out plans for child care and support. Court systems are unlikely to be able to impose domestic arrangements—even monetary ones—that have not been arrived at by mutual consent. And even such solutions worked out in good faith must be monitored and reinforced if they are likely to ripen into successful child arrangements.

Finally, hostility toward the child support system was pervasive among the informants for this report. There are many barriers to gaining cooperation from women who feel that the system is uninterested and unresponsive to their needs and from men who believe that they are being unfairly pursued and that it does not help their children. In many respects, the current system is coming to be viewed in the same light as the welfare and criminal justice bureaucracies. This has to be addressed if poor children are to benefit. I was impressed by how much informal resistance to child support was evident among the very people whom it was designed to help.

IV. Child Support Obligations: What Fathers Say About Paying

Kay E. Sherwood

Two staff members from MDRC, Fred Doolittle and Kay Sherwood, went to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the fall of 1991 to assess a consortium of Kent County agencies being considered as a site to test the Parents' Fair Share model. One of the consortium's strengths was its experience operating a program for unemployed noncustodial parents that was similar in purpose and design to the Parents' Fair Share concept. In this Absent Parent Support Program, for about three years prior to the MDRC visit, noncustodial parents who were delinquent in child support payments in Kent County were routinely ordered by child support hearing officers to participate in employment services, which generally meant a five-week job-finding workshop conducted by a local community education program at a large adult school building. It was at this workshop that the Doolittle/Sherwood team from MDRC found parents for the first of the focus group interviews summarized below—"I Would If I Could."

On the day of this focus group, 12 parents—all fathers—were attending the community education workshop and chose to participate in the discussion. Eight of the 12 were black; 4 were white. It was Tuesday of the second week of the workshop schedule, which meant that, of the 27 parents who showed up for the start of the workshop eight days earlier, those easily able to get jobs with the type of assistance provided in the workshop were no longer participating. Thus, the interviewers met with a fairly discouraged—and apparently disadvantaged—group of men, several of whom had been through the workshop before, sometimes more than once; these men had been "caught" for nonpayment of child support and had been unemployed on previous occasions during the last three years. No staff members from any of the Absent Parent Support Program agencies were present during the interview.

The second group interview summarized below is very different from the others reported on in this document. The title, "When Money Isn't the Issue," suggests one theme of the discussion: Noncustodial parents have concerns about the child support system that go beyond their financial obligations. The parents interviewed on this occasion were members of a fathers' rights group and were invited by the chief local child support administrator to the discussion, which was held at the offices of the child support enforcement agency. None of the groups interviewed in Baltimore, New York City, or Grand Rapids was chosen for representativeness, but the members of the fathers' rights organization could be expected to have more negative views of the child support system than the others, since they had joined an organization whose mission was to *change* the system. The men who participated in this discussion—there were four, all of them white—were also better off than those who were interviewed at the Absent Parent Support Program in Grand Rapids; they were all employed, although they reported that a third to a half of the members of their organization could use help with employment. A fifth participant in the group interview was a woman who had experienced the child support system under several conditions: She was the wife of one of the noncustodial fathers interviewed, the custodial mother of a child by a previous marriage, and a recipient of child support.

I Would If I Could

One of the most troublesome aspects of child support is the divergence between what many noncustodial parents say about what they should and want to do and what they actually do. Among the 12 fathers attending the job-finding workshop of the Absent Parent Support Program, where their presence signaled noncompliance with the formal child support system, as well as unemployment, none rejected the principle of providing financial support for their children. Not surprisingly, one theme of their stories was hard luck—losing jobs, falling behind, and getting discouraged. But a key question for custodial parents and children, and for public policy, is: Would they pay if they were working? Other parts of the discussion with the unemployed fathers produce a mixed answer. "I would if I could" is what most of those interviewed said, but between the lines lie hints that this would not always happen.

Getting and Losing Jobs

Billy S. had worked for a national shipping company for 14 or 15 years. He saw his child support problems as directly related to his unemployment problems:

> When I were paying and I were working it weren't no problem . . . Don't you know I would be happy, more than happy to have a job this morning? What you gonna do? Maybe some in here not want to have a job. Maybe some here maybe just in here to knock away time, you know? . . . But I went through this training . . . it was a six months' training and I still got my certificate in my hand . . . Nothing.

Others in the group explained their presence at the job search workshop in similar terms. George W. said:

> We're all here for the same purpose. That's because of the [child support enforcement agency]. We all have different stories. Mine is that I *had* a job. But through a labor dispute . . . been on strike for over 18 months. Due to the 18 months on strike, I'm here—whether I like it or not. I hope some time, some day this dispute will end one way or another, but right now I've got a big monkey on my back.

George W. was caught in a situation that he thought would not get resolved until either the strike at his company was settled or the company dissolved or succeeded in busting his union, because no one wanted to hire a union member on strike, he said. But he also described the changes in the job market that had taken place since he started work:

> Getting a job, when I was coming out of school looking for a job, you just went and asked an employer for a job and sign and fill out a simple application . . . Back then, to be a white-collar worker you had to have a resume. Today, the blue-collar worker also has to have a resume, which we don't know anything about. We're not used to it. We've never done it. And when you've worked at one position for this many years, there's no need even knowing anything about a resume because you're here financially, this is where you're gonna want to stay at.

Milt B.'s story was less complicated, the way he told it:

> I had a business, I was paying $132 a week, you know. I lost my business . . . I closed it up 'cause I got hurt. So I fell behind on my child support. But I still paying something like $50 every two weeks . . . they set up this system [the Absent Parent Support Program] so you don't go to jail. You be anywhere else, you'd be in jail.

Other men in the group talked about getting jobs and losing jobs. Rick J., for example, said:

> I was in here before, you know, something like 18 months ago. When they first started me here, it was my first time ever come to this school. And then I told them—it was on the third day—I told them, I said, "I'm not going to be here," because I had already put in applications to two different places and I knew these places were going to hire me . . . But I screwed it up myself 'cause I went to work for my brother and he lost his company. That's why I'm here today.

It was Roger J.'s third time going through the program: "The first time I went through this program, they helped me a lot, I got a nice-paying job. But I'm the one that screwed it up, but whatever it takes."

Many of the men in the group wanted very much to go to work. Billy S. described how frustrating the job search process is, in spite of the help provided by the job-finding workshop:

> Sometime it just seem to be a little bit slow for us. You know, 'cause we just want to get out there and get to work. Get our lives back rolling again, you know. It's kinda hard to be patient and it's just a patient game that's going, you know.

Lloyd D., Rick J., and John D. were all frustrated with the process of calling employers who might not have openings, making many applications, getting turned down:

> Lloyd D.: If these companies would just come out here and just, you know, pick people for a job, it would be a lot easier. We can call, we can call a hundred times and they'll tell us . . . you know, from these job leads [provided by the workshop] . . . and then we'll call and they'll say: "Hey, we're not taking applications right now." You go out there, try to put in applications and everything. It were hassle. But it works. Sooner or later.

> Rick J.: Or it could be like temporary service, too. Place you into a job. You know, where you could work your way onto the payroll.
>
> John D.: Just send us to a job. Hook up a job where they would deal with people like us. Instead of going all through. These guys need jobs. That would be a lot better.

Good Intentions

Would these men pay child support if they were working? There were many statements in support of George W.'s summary: "I don't think anybody's running away from paying child support." Speaking about his own behavior, George W. said:

> If I had it, I'd pay . . . With my age, working at one job for this many years, it's not that I'm a job jumper or anything of that nature. I'm not running away from my responsibility as far as paying child support . . . It's just due to circumstance that we're here.

From Milt B., who was separated from the mother of his son: "The bottom line is, it's yours, you pay for it. That's the bottom line." Rick J., who is responsible for child support for two children and has a new family, had a similar view: "You lay, you pay." John D. said: "We don't mind paying . . . it's our kids, we're gonna pay, any man's going to tell you that . . . We willing to take on responsibility."

Milt B. offered evidence of his willingness to provide for his child:

> My kid's wearing some Nike tennis shoes that cost $165 and he's six years old. My son, he got a motorcycle. He's only six years old, he got a 750 motorcycle. I got a 900, his mother got a 1000. He don't want for nothing. [He turned to another of the fathers.] You know my son. He don't want for nothing. He got go-carts . . . You know my son wearing Nike tennis shoes, Jordache jeans. Pair of jeans cost as much as mine do—$35.

Billy S.'s reaction to this was:

> You know what you ought to do, man? You ought to do like I'm going to do when I can get myself right. You ought to go and just get custody of your kids if you paying and paying like that. 'Cause that's like I was doing for my kids when I were working. I would pay this every week . . . automatic just come out of the check . . . I don't care what the other guys thinking about their kids, I thinking 'bout my kids. I come in and my kid, my son, stand six foot three, come over and say: "Daddy, you got some money, I got to go out, I want to get me this." "C'mon, boy [yes]." I do not care; I'm paying this money 'cause this is *my* son.

Paying: Theory Versus Reality

Their current lack of income is only one of the reasons that many of the men interviewed are not fulfilling their child support obligations. These reasons were seldom explicitly stated in terms of "I don't pay because . . . ." However, the fathers talked about the child support system, and sometimes the mothers of their children, in ways that often sounded like: "If I had the money and it were up to me, I might not pay because . . . ."

Providing Versus Paying Through the System

For some, there is a crucial distinction between complying with the formal child support system and making direct payments to the mothers and/or buying things for their children. While Milt B. claimed to be a lavish provider for his son, he was not doing all of it through the formal child support system and, in fact, he objected strongly to the legal mechanisms for child support, which he thought were unnecessary for fathers who were in contact with their children: "It's another thing to pay the [child support enforcement agency] and see your kid, too. I see my kid every day." After describing the expensive clothes and other items that he had provided, Milt B. volunteered—even bragged—that he was doing this outside the system:

> I don't give the [child support enforcement agency] all my goddamn money. No way . . . What I can't see is why you want to pay them. I can see you owe a hospital bill or something like that, right? Whyn't you just send the money to the hospital bill? You give the [child support enforcement agency] money, your wife don't get the money for three weeks later.

"Make Me"

Clark S. had a different explanation for his defiance of the system. He told a complicated tale of the child support enforcement agency's failure to take his money:

> *They* screwed up at first. [Everyone laughs.] They did, seriously. When they first told me they was going to start garnishing my check, I had left the first job I was working at. So now all this paperwork done, they found out where I was working at, I talked to the man and worked out my payments. Now they sent me some more paperwork, but from the previous job that I had, not from the job that I was at then. So they messed me up. 'Cause they could have been taking money. I was at the job four years . . . They didn't do anything. And I wasn't gonna say: "Well, hell, come and take care of this" 'cause that's money I had to survive on.

As Clark S. explained it, when the child support enforcement agency finally caught up to him, he lost his job, and he blamed the child support system for his accumulated debt:

> *They* put me in the hole . . . I should not have to report to them . . . [because the state has your Social Security number] they can always find where you are, at your

> job . . . I'm trying to live . . . They could have done that so long ago it's pathetic. They try so hard to take your money, they should be able to do it.

Two other men in the group reported situations that could easily have been the result of years of noncompliance with the child support system. Robert D., a soft-spoken man who had difficulty getting into the discussion, made his statement several times before he was recognized: "I owe $14,000." At one time, he had had $18,000 in child support arrears and he was intrigued by a rumored (but nonexistent) method of discharging child support debts: "They have a new thing they bringing out, you can go to the penitentiary and stay two years, and you don't have to pay no more child support." Robert D. was 37 years old, with a child age 20; his "baby" was 15.

Roger J., who was on his third time through the job-finding workshop, was about $8,000 in arrears on child support, and his noncompliance had interrupted his life considerably:

> I'm just getting tired of getting locked up every so often, every eight months or so. I don't have no bad record, no record at all. But I just keep getting locked up for child support, that's the main thing.

Welfare: Whose Debt Is It?

The idea of paying child support to discharge a welfare debt does not sit well with some fathers, and has little to do with their sense of themselves as providers for their children. Many of the men's families are on welfare, and while some do not recognize the public assistance as *their* debt, most believe that the main reason the child support agency pursues them persistently is because of the welfare system's payments to their families. For example, Milt B. claimed: "It's the welfare . . . they take half of that money that you give them. I'm paying $132 and she only get like maybe $50 . . . The welfare is pushing the issue. It's the welfare, man." Roger J. demonstrated what seemed to be a common understanding among the men about the connection between their child support arrearages and welfare: "Every time they get a girl a check, that's just money that's added on to what you owe."

The System: "That's Not Right"

The local child support enforcement agency came in for a lot of criticism from the men interviewed in this group. It sometimes seemed to be the source of all their troubles, and certainly was considered the source of a great deal of pressure in their lives. As Robert D. put it: "Yeah, [the child support system] that's the number one racket." John D., who estimated his child support arrears at $600, said that "it's hectic"—trying to keep up child support payments, pay off past child support debts, and have money for themselves and/or their new families. "That's what's killing us," he said:

> Child support, you know, it's still high . . . we're not working. Why don't they work with us . . . if they want to work with us so much, why don't they try and lower that so we can start work it won't be so hectic . . . It's still going up.

Emblematic of the fathers' feelings about the child support system was John D.'s statement about the attractive marble-floored building where the offices of the agency are housed: "All of us can say that we paid for that building," which was followed by Milt B.'s observation that "we ain't through paying for it." There were several kinds of complaints: (1) The child support enforcement people make mistakes in their accounting and procedures that fathers end up paying for; (2) they treat fathers without respect and understanding; and (3) the system does not deal with the problematic behavior of custodial parents—compared to mothers, fathers are treated unfairly.

John D. believed that his child support payments were set high (at $100 per week) because he missed that "day when the paperwork went down"; he didn't know he had to go and that "got the judge against me." George W., who was on strike, had a child support order for $114 a week for three minor-age children, which included some payment on arrearages. He focused on the child support enforcement agency's methods for ensuring that child support was paid first:

> The [child support enforcement agency] wants their money just for their books . . . They even take out in advance . . . That's all they're concerned with, keep their books straight. They say: "Well, if you don't make that certain amount, we'll take less out," but it doesn't work that way because the way they interpret it to the employer, they've got to have their money. Even when I worked . . . and I had slow weeks, the [child support enforcement agency] got their full amount and I walked home with payslips saying zero. And they didn't say: "Sorry." They didn't give me any money back. I also paid in reverse. They took out more money so my arrearage was ahead, four or five hundred dollars. They didn't come to me and say: "Hey, you're paying too much here." I had to go to them. Once they figured it out, they said: "Aw, you're right." I said: "O.K., I want that money back." They said: "No, we can't give it back to you, because your ex has to have money for the week whether you're ahead or behind and so you still have to pay. The only thing is, you won't pay as much. We still have to take it out." So they never gave me any money back . . . they lessened up for a while to try and catch up to make it a little more even, balance out.

Many of the fathers interviewed resented the treatment they got from the child support bureaucracy. The impersonal nature of child support "enforcement" was one major grievance, characterized by different fathers in these ways: "The court system is treating us like criminals." "The mother and children are all human, the father, they place him as a piece of machinery: Work. Pay." "Always saying, 'You owe, you owe.'"

But the attitude and behavior of the child support enforcement agency staff aggravated the men just as much. At times, they seemed to be describing "us and them" interactions that were made more difficult by class, race, and gender differences. One of the men argued for a type of child support enforcement agency counselor more like themselves:

> They don't need nobody just come out of school . . . take these [counseling] jobs [at the child support enforcement agency] and . . . telling these men 'cause they owe

> child support. They don't need no kinda counselor up there, they need somebody—like George W. here—know how to communicate with us, because someone that don't been through this kinda life . . . We all know that that's their jobs, you know, and they treat us just like that . . . those ladies that's their *job*, they don't like us.

Women

Women were rarely blamed for the fathers' problems in this group (perhaps because there was a female interviewer present), but three different conflict situations between men and women were discussed. Explaining what the interviewers would be likely to hear from guys who do not pay, George W. described the similarities among divorced fathers:

> You're gonna hear the same story no matter where you go . . . the same story, along with, in any divorce there's problems. Probably each one of us has the same problem . . . Like, for example, mine is: I'm divorced. I did not ask for a divorce, I am divorced. And I will pay my child support, no problem. The problem comes in at visitation, in most cases, it's visitation . . . Why do I have to pay when I don't have visitation?

George W. wasn't confident that the child support money he paid was really going to his children:

> The [child support enforcement agency] will receive that money . . . I don't care how long it takes to pass it on to your ex-spouse, that money is supposedly to be used for child support, the word is *child* support. But how many spouses will take that money herself and use it for her own pleasure, the kids still do not get things that they need? They're on our case constantly to pay that money, but when we ask the child support enforcement agency to . . . we don't mind paying it, that isn't our problem . . . the problem is that money that is being paid to that spouse, where is that money going? They will not account for that money.

Clark S., who thought the child support system ought to have been able to find him without his help, did not believe that he should have had an obligation in the first place:

> The thing with me is, I didn't even know if I was going to be a father because she wasn't going to tell me, and she would not let me participate really in doing nothing for [my son]. I see him all the time. Every time I see him: "Does he need anything?" "No, he don't." So why should I pay child support? She did it out of spite.

In addition to believing that the mother of his child had the baby in order to make him pay, Clark S. explained that he had been advised by staff from the local department of social services not to voluntarily consent to paternity acknowledgment. The fact that establishing legal paternity by blood test and court hearings took years reinforced his negative attitude toward paying child support.

Roger J., who had been attracted to the idea of discharging his child support debt by spending two years in the penitentiary, objected to paying child support because of the life circumstances of the mother of his children:

> I see my kids off and on. She done moved out of state, then came back, moved out of state, came back, and it was an understanding a couple of years ago that if a woman moved out of state, or you had a kid that was mentally ill or something, that you wouldn't have to pay child support. But what I'm getting at is that . . . the woman that I got kids by, she's married, her name has changed entirely different, so she married this guy, he's sitting at home right now while I'm at school, and if I'm paying anything the check comes in his name. She get a welfare check, you know, but since he's supposed to be the man of the household, the check comes in his name . . . No, he didn't adopt the kids . . . What I feel is that she's carrying his name, but the kids they still have my name, but the check that comes to her from welfare, he has hold over that check, which is for those kids.

Jail

There was a great deal of discussion about jail time as the penalty for failure to comply with the child support system. These men thought it was a reality. (In Kent County, 30-day sentences for contempt of court are sometimes used in "tough cases.") Some, like Milt B. ("you be anywhere else, you be in jail"), were probably in the job-finding workshop because they thought jail was the alternative. For example, Louie H. explained his presence this way: "It's something we have to do, something we have to pay back." Some thought it did not make sense to send a father to jail because he didn't pay: "If I go to jail, how you going to get my money?"

Prescriptions: What Fathers Would Do Differently

Although the men in the job-finding workshop praised the workshop leader and saw much value in the first week of instruction, during which they learned about resumes and cover letters, they disliked the limited nature of the assistance and the feeling of being recycled through the program for no purpose. Clark S., among others, thought that the child support enforcement cycle was a kind of social control mechanism:

> Camaraderie . . . I'd have the parents working together on this, along with a counselor know what they doing . . . 'cause like I said, you know, it gets tough. We sit in here . . . we just sit in here making phone calls. We don't do that, after five weeks we back in here. It's really not . . . It's nothing. It's like something for them to do just to make sure that we in check. That's all it is, it's like we up under they thumb. We can't do nothing. We don't find a job . . . we on probation.

There were a few suggestions for improving the self-directed job search approach emphasized in the Absent Parent Support Program. Early in the group interview, John D., Rick J., and Lloyd D. recommended bringing companies that were actually hiring into the school where the job-finding club was held to select men for their job openings. Toward the end of the interview, John D. connected work and paying child support by suggesting that noncustodial parents should be able to work at community service jobs that would reduce their obligations:

> Like you go to work off a fine and you got to do so many community hours or something like that. It should be some kind of system like that where you can work some of that money off or do whatever you can . . . Should have a program going, be paying something towards it at the same time . . . Should be more to it than just this. Should be working toward that money, too.

For many of the men, community service was unacceptable. Billy S. had an idea that the wage rate would be $1.65 an hour; others thought it would be very low and they would have nothing to survive on themselves. John D. revised his suggestion to make his scheme "optional, for these guys who wanted to." In response, Rick J. came back to the idea of matching the unemployed fathers to jobs directly:

> They should just hook us up with a factory and have us going to work, pay you a paycheck, and they take out . . . Six dollars an hour, eight hours a day, even if we have to work Saturday . . . That way we make money, plus overtime, getting experience, on-the-job training, and we get done there we can go to another job after that.

Entangled with their complaints about the child support system were hints about how it could work better for them. John D., who said his obligations made his life "hectic," also felt that fathers should get some kind of credit toward their child support obligations for making the effort to search for a job through the program:

> *You owe* . . . that's what I'm thinking about. They claim that *you owe*, that's the problem. We should be able to go through this workshop and work towards that, work some of the money off while we're in here. The way we're going, we're always going down and they say five weeks [the length of required participation in the job-finding workshop] . . . without ever getting a job. We don't mind paying . . . I think they should be working with us to help us get somewhere . . . even if we had to go to school and knock off five bucks or ten bucks, or whatever . . . start knocking it off until we get to work, to better ourselves . . . You owe, that's the main thing.

Being treated with more understanding and respect by the child support agency staff was the focus of most suggestions, although Rick J. had a novel idea. He wondered why his obligation couldn't be financed like a car loan:

> What I want to know is how come you can't pay it off for 18 years . . . The whole thing . . . I mean all your payments. Add up all your payments . . . It's like for me I owe $34,000 . . . if I could pay it off for 18 years . . . but you can't do that. This person told me it's 'cause the cost of living goes up each year . . . I'm saying if there's a possible way to get a loan or something . . . you know, like financing a car.

When Money Isn't the Issue

> Keith M.: If people can't see their kids, they shouldn't have to pay child support . . . Why would you pay if you don't see your kids?
>
> Jeffrey B.: If you don't see your kids, that's part of why you had the kids is to be able to see them, play with them and have a little say in their life and what they do and where they go and things, and if you don't have that, they aren't really your kids.

These statements from members of the fathers' rights group interviewed by Doolittle and Sherwood characterize some of the resentment that noncustodial parents have toward the child support system—perhaps a dominant source of resentment for the parents who are financially able to pay. There is a *quid pro quo* in child support for these parents: "*If* I pay child support, I should be able to see my kids" and "I *do* pay child support and, therefore, I should be able to see my kids" are alternative constructions of Keith M.'s and Jeffrey B.'s statements. The other fathers' rights group members interviewed in Grand Rapids would certainly have agreed with these alternatives. In fact, creating an explicit tie between child support and visitation in Michigan family law is a chief goal of the organization.

But for the four men who spoke to the interviewers, none of these statements puts the emphasis in the right place emotionally. First and foremost, these men wanted to see their children and play the role of father, despite their divorces, and they said they were satisfied to pay child support if they could do that. Getting access to their children was at the root of their complaints about the child support system and their attempts to change it. Their inability to be with their children and be the parents they want to be causes these men pain, and produces in them a sense of helplessness. But the fact that they are forced to pay child support on top of being denied what they consider their parental rights makes them angry.

At the end of the interview, summarizing what it means to be a father, the men described what hurts. Jeffrey B. said:

> What I miss most of anything of not being married like I was . . . when I came home from work, those kids were there and they come out saying, "daddy, daddy," and then we played. And that was taken away. I've never seen my kids come home from school. I've never gotten to see them leave for school, 'cause they were younger when we got divorced. Once in a while I'd wake up and hear them playing and stuff and then at three o'clock when it was time to get up they'd come in and wake me up. That's the best way to be woken up is to have your kids come in and

> jump on the bed and say: "Dad, it's time to get up, let's play." For that to all be taken away, that's almost like taking your fatherhood away 'cause that's what it is to be a father. Sure you work, and you try to supply money for your family and like that, but yet those kids are going to be there every day for you. And all of a sudden, just because your ex-wife don't want to be married anymore, that's all taken away.

David D. gave an example of the incidents that remind noncustodial fathers how little, sometimes, they are able to do as parents:

> I think being included and involved in the children's life is what it's about . . . like when they have activities that you can be a part of, at least notified that you can be a part of . . . Do you know that fathers, unless you have it written and legal, can't have access to their children's school grades? I called my child's school and I couldn't have that . . . I'm not her parent, I'm not the custodial parent . . . stuff like that . . . that's a sin. I mean I'm paying to raise these kids . . . it's my child and everything, and why can't I know what's going on in their life, you know? Just being involved in what's going on, being included and not excluded because of it, things like that.

Miller M. described being a father this way:

> I think just simple things that you do with your kids, that's being a father . . . It isn't paying money to a court system being a father, it's taking a walk with them, putting them to bed at night, just listening to, "Hey, what did you do today, what happened to you?" That's being a father, you know, a parent . . . put them to bed, share what your feelings are, you share what your thoughts are, what's going on, what is it you'd like to do in the future. You are not only part of their present, you're part of their past and part of their future irregardless of what the current scene is, how much money you're paying. You're part of a spiritual nature . . . we're not just money.

Leading up to these vignettes of lost family happiness were long explanations for the interviewers of how things go wrong in divorces, and how the child support system fails fathers and children, with illustrations drawn both from the personal experiences of the people interviewed and from the experiences of members of the fathers' rights group who were not present. While the stories provide a useful perspective on some fathers' concerns, it was also apparent that the people interviewed had practice in telling their stories and a great deal of experience with the group format. The exchanges that follow provide a view of a support group in action, with its catharsis, sharing, and signals of agreement. They also suggest the similarity of opinion and language that often results when people self-select for participation in groups.

How Does It Get in a Mess?

All of the fathers interviewed were divorced, as was Sharon D., whose marriage to David D., in the fathers' rights group, was her second. The conflicts between custodial and noncustodial parents who divorced were, for the fathers, aggravated by the treatment they got from the child support system. According to David D., any new program, like Parents' Fair Share, would have an uphill battle with some fathers:

> One thing you obviously got to do something . . . not only for these dads who did not have jobs, but overcoming their hostility toward the rest of the system. Regardless of what politicians and everybody else will tell you . . . everything is against the fathers for the most part . . . it's another strong problem you gonna have to overcome—the fact that the guys have so much anger 'cause everything is against them.
>
> The other thing is the fact that you get a lot of, majority of the mothers out there that want as much as they can get and when that's not enough, they want more and they want more and they want more and keep on wanting . . . That's what the guys are getting sick of . . . People aren't really complaining about the child support so much, it's the visitation part. They don't get enough time with their kids, and you feel like you're buying it.

Jeffrey B., who had joint custody of his children, also saw the system as favoring mothers:

> When I started out, I didn't even know what it was all about. I was more worried about getting my kids than I was the money part of it. When my ex-wife left, she wouldn't let me see the kids at all and so I went to court the first time around and they said: "Well, you get such-and-such and you pay such-and-such." Kinda bad I got to pay to see my kids, you know, and I've seen a lot of fathers eventually give up because they're paying so much money and they're seeing them so little, they're better off starting over with another family, so most of them walk away.

Talking about his own situation in another county, Miller M. emphasized fathers' visitation rights:

> I would say fathers don't need another job, they just need their own children. The letter says this [child support] will be enforced by the court and you'll be jailed or arrested or found in contempt if you don't follow this order. I get the same copy of an order that says your rights to visitation are such-and-such days, so many times, but the enforcement of that right is: "Well, just go see your psychologist."

Keith M. was concerned about the expense of two households:

> There's a lotta fathers—well like myself [whose kids are out of state]. I get to see my child twice a year, Christmas and summertime. The rest of the time, I don't know what she's doing. I don't know how she's being brought up. It's scary. You have

> to build a work program that [recognizes], hey, men have feelings, they love their children, they want to be a part of their kids' life. The support is going to come if they do find them a job. It's going to be tagged right on. *But*, that it be also apportioned so they can afford to live and have a place when they do have their children, and also feed their children when they do have them, and that support get reversed.

Second families were Sharon D.'s major concern:

> Having a second family . . . there should also be considered that the man has another family and he's just an honest, decent guy that's just trying to be happy so leave him alone. But these other ex-wives . . . I see this in a lot of situations . . . they see that the husband now has a new woman and he's happy, and gosh what can I do to screw that up and make him miserable? And it works, it really works. And the child support part of it, there's so many families . . . second families out there that are scraping because of the child support, and I'm not against child support, but *reasonable*, you know. Why should that second family have to suffer because there's kids over here? Sometimes there's kids in that second family, too.
>
> David D.: My kids just recently moved to California. Two months ago I was told that they moved out of state. My son asked me before they left, that if he could come back and see me a lot, and I told him I just can't afford to have you flying back and forth and it just shocked the hell right out of him. He said: "Dad, why do you gotta give her any money. You know she works. Joe"—that's his stepdad—"he has a lotta money. Why do you have to pay?"

Where Does the Money Go?

Expanding on what he said about fathers' hostility toward the child support system, David D. said that fathers' concerns about paying are centered on whether they see their money benefiting their children:

> I think that you'd find the majority of fathers, whether they have a job or don't have a job, have no problem paying support. [It's] . . . the way it's brought on and the way it's used . . . I think I pay too much already and my ex is trying to get more, but if we could see the money more going to the kids, I'd pay more. I don't have a problem with that. But to have the ex's lifestyle go up and have mine go down and my kids' stay the same, that's not what the whole thing is about here. So many fathers have the situation where the kids come home for a weekend, you're providing clothes for that weekend because they are not allowed to bring any clothes over. I currently pay $125 a week and when I got to spend $144 on a jacket for the weekend that he usually will take back to their house, that adds up . . . Decent fathers—which are more than most people realize—they have no problems paying this money, but it's *child* support. It's used as ex-wife support, but it's supposed to be child support.

Jeffrey B. explained why a recent meeting that the fathers' rights group held with officials of the local child support system focused on accountability for child support monies:

> The whole thing was accountability . . . accountability as to what they do with the money, you know —receipts—just like if you got kids that are in a foster home or something, those parents got to bring receipts as to where they spend the money, but yet a mother can't do that . . . To me, if they had some sort of accountability—which really isn't that hard. I keep my receipts from my food and stuff like that, that wouldn't be too hard to do even if they just told you to bring in one month's worth of accountability for a year, they may find out that maybe child support shouldn't be that high.

Other Problems with the Child Support System

Following Jeffrey B.'s discussion of accountability, Keith M. explained that the chief local child support enforcement official says the staff that would be needed for such accounting procedures are not available. Jeffrey B. disagreed. He saw the problem as one of bureaucratic inefficiency:

> They do [have the staff], but they've got to utilize their hours a little more. I just went through an evaluation [for custody] that shoulda took less than two months and it was two years long. And they done it twice because the first time the person that done it screwed it up.

Keith M. pointed out the implications of experiences like Jeffrey B.'s for the "amount of legal fees needed" by noncustodial parents to deal with the child support system. He also believes that air travel or transportation needs should affect child support and programs to help noncustodial parents find jobs.

> If you were to find a person a minimum-wage job and his child lives in California, New York, or wherever, he couldn't see his child, he's at a disadvantage and already . . . he's building up more hatred towards his ex-wife because of that and it's showing towards his children, or hers. Just finding a person a job is not enough . . . There should be additional allowances and also more help in the system to be able to help that person see his kids.

David D. added to his wife's (Sharon's) comments about the amount of money needed to support both the children and the noncustodial parent:

> Take a guy that's not working. Obviously he can't live on his own. He's got to be living with parents, friends, whatever like that because he can't support himself. You get that guy, say, a $20,000 a year job and out of that comes child support, he still can't live . . . He still, once you put support, he still has to live with somebody. Twenty grand's not a bad income, really, but all of a sudden that 20 grand becomes $15,000 or $14,000 after taxes and after child support comes out about $8,000 or $9,000 in his pocket. He still cannot afford to live. This is the problem I see with

> what you guys [Parents' Fair Share] are trying to do here. The situations where the kids are on government help—they're still gonna be there, somehow something's gotta be there because it can't be done, to pay the amount of money we fathers have to pay and still be able to live on your own and, God forbid, having to start another family.

Jeffrey B. illustrated:

> And right at first, too . . . like when my ex and I filed for divorce, I had a house payment . . . Fortunately we didn't have a car payment. They thought it was bad that I had to move back in with my folks to live. Well, I showed them exactly what I had left after I got done paying child support and stuff. I had less than $80 a week to live on, so how does somebody expect you to go out and rent a $400 apartment, which is about what it would take here . . . let alone eat and everything else . . . Guys get caught in the middle, so why should I work 40 hours a week and not make ends meet? Why not live on public assistance and not make ends meet—what's the difference? That's probably where a lot of guys would come from.

Fathers' attempts to pursue custody and win seemed to be a particularly frustrating experience. Keith M. reported that fathers who were never married to the mothers of their children had an easier time of it than divorced men:

> We did have a couple in our group, of paternity cases . . . it seemed to be easier for them as a nonmarried individual to get custody than people that are divorced going fighting through the law . . . it seems to take 10 times longer and go nowhere, they have some major problems.

Talking about his own extended custody battle, Jeffrey B. focused on how both the process and its outcome didn't make any sense:

> It was two years back and forth with the [child support agency], the judge kept throwing it back. Well, couple more years and my kids will be out of school . . . I don't understand why they keep throwing it back . . . [The judge] give us joint legal and joint physical custody, but I only see my kids every other weekend and one day during the week. How can I be in a close, nurturing relationship with my kids when I only see them 48 hours every other weekend and 4 hours during the week? It don't make sense, it don't add up.

The War Between the Sexes: Child Support and Visitation as Weapons

Keith M. described the *quid pro quo*—child support for visitation—as one way that divorced men and women understand their positions in a battle, except that the men do not have equal weaponry anymore:

> There isn't any [public assistance] for men. For a guy, he's at a total loss, he doesn't only lose his kids [in a divorce], a lot of the women who do custodial care use that

> as a weapon . . . The women will use visitation and the only alternative men used to have was child support as a weapon. Now it's mandatory, it's yanked right out of their check no matter what . . . but still the noncustodial parent's always at a disadvantage, *always*. No matter which way he tries to see he can't get there. The custodial parent can move away to another state to evade him or her trying to see the children and in many, many cases the children are turned against the father or the mother–the noncustodial parent.

Making It Better: What Can Be Done?

The people from the fathers' rights group had much more to say about the problems of the child support system than about how to correct those problems, but their response to a program that would help unemployed fathers was generally positive. Keith M. focused on the issues that would arise in a program targeting unemployed fathers:

> Society does not envision men as good parents and good fathers to raise and nurture a child . . . There's a lot more women working and a lot more men at home taking care of the kids . . . This is not being recognized. If a guy does find a job, he's going to have to find sitters for the kids.

Jeffrey B. referred to the type of media coverage that good fathers hate: "Donahue had one the other day. Child support evader." Keith M. continued in this same vein:

> That's a major problem because some of the good guys that have paid and paid, see their kids, do everything they can, are getting punished because of the guy that's $3,000 or $4,000 behind on his child support and that's a never-ending story right there. For your work program, that's got to be envisioned because that's where you find not just the hatred, but the holding back, the hostility, the buildup. I mean how's a guy going to do good on it, in starting finding a job, if he has to put up with all of this and can't see his children.

Jeffrey B. emphasized two-earner/two-caretaker families, even when they are divorced:

> I think it would be good, too . . . talking about the custodial parent and the noncustodial parent, trying to find them both jobs. What it would be nice to do is try to find alternating jobs to where one parent's working and the other parent's watching the kids. I still think that the more time a parent's got with their children, the better they feel about themselves. The better the kids feel about themselves, the more secure the kids are going to feel. To me, rather than having a mother, a custodial parent working and having day care or somebody watch the kid, why not have the other parent watch the kids? It's free, they get to love and nurture those kids, that's why I think the best way to do it is to have both of them get jobs.

Keith M. wanted a different split of responsibilities, too:

> Not only alternating, but what you have to take into account, too, is child care. If both parents, with the rising cost of inflation, have to work, and let's say they have joint custody and they're living in the same school district, if they have to work and the children have to be taken care of by child care, that should be split . . . and if you are going to push for a work program, also ask for assistance from all the other individual funded services, like United Way, so they will help noncustodial parents *and* custodial parents nonbiased, it should not matter if it's a man or woman.

Miller M. brought this discussion of what to do to improve the system back to the reasons that fathers would want to work and pay child support:

> If you're talking about getting jobs for fathers, the motivation would be custody, not the job itself, but actually an equal chance at custody. And the parents' rights being enforced. That would be the incentive of getting off welfare or not having a job or whatever, it's having the *children*.

David D. reiterated his opinion that most fathers want to do the right thing, and talked about what it would take to turn these intentions into actions:

> Most fathers or noncustodial parents would prefer having a job and paying their support, if they could still live, as opposed to not having a job and not paying their support. Most fathers really *want* to take care of their children . . . as long as they can live their own life, because there's a very large majority of the people who get divorced, get remarried, and have another family. It's a real burden on a [second] family if there's a family you're supporting . . . it's financially difficult.
>
> Keith M: For a work program, it's the way you approach people and say, look, our services are going to help fathers, or noncustodial parents, get a job to help them see their children more *and* pay their child support. If that vision comes true—where all the services come together . . . It's going to have to see the need that the father needs to nurture his children, he wants to be near them . . . You pull that away, he's not going to care if he has a job or not. And then the child support, wanting to pay the child support, is going to drop off.

When Fathers Try to Avoid Responsibility

In answer to a question about the motivations of fathers who were not married, and try to avoid establishing legal paternity and paying child support, Jeffrey B. explained his assumptions about such behavior:

> Most of them are probably young guys that really didn't want a family to start with and just were out there for the fun of it and got caught. That's about what it amounts to, and probably they aren't ready for the responsibilities of a family.

Keith M. and David D. had different explanations. They assumed that fathers who were not paying any child support were not able to see their kids, or the mother was interfering with the relationships between the father and the children. Keith M.:

> Most of the guys I've seen are real straightforward. They say: "Look, I want to see my kids. I want to be part of their life." They can't go to their school activities, see them, help them with their homework . . . The ones who are not paying, the ones who are having a very difficult time, the ones on the street, they aren't gonna come to any support meetings, they aren't gonna come to you [Parents' Fair Share], they're gonna be lost forever unless someone picks them up.
>
> Jeffrey B.: I would dare say most of those fathers that you're talking about, they're probably either fathers who really never cared about the kid in the first place and maybe just try to avoid child support because it isn't part of what they figure they should owe—the ex-wife's got the kids, why should I pay?—or they're ones that just totally give up and walk away from it all.
>
> David D.: Those that don't pay, there's probably a very large percentage that just as soon pay, so why not concentrate on those and forget the one that don't. There's always some . . . I mean you could take somebody that has nothing and give them a million dollars and tomorrow they'll still have nothing. Maybe that's the kinda guys people should be going after . . . If there's in Michigan 10,000 divorced fathers that are not paying support, I guarantee you there's probably 4,000 that just as soon pay it and have a job . . . and that's the ones . . . they can't get work, or they can't get work and live on what they're making or something like that . . . there's probably more guys out there that would like to work and pay support than you can find a job for.

What Is a Father's Role?

The members of the fathers' rights group feel that an injustice is done to them when their parental role is not recognized, accepted, and appreciated. The noncustodial fathers who were interviewed feel that they are more than adequate parents; they not only can be "nurturing" (a word that recurred in the discussion), but they also make a unique, irreplaceable contribution to their children's development:

> Jeffrey B.: A father's got different input in their kids' life than a mother does . . . that's where they get their strength and their courage and everything else . . . It's proven more and more in all the statistics I see that kids raised without a father are gonna have problems in later years. Girls . . . they usually find the love that they missed with their father in relationships that usually end up nowhere because they're looking for the wrong thing in that relationship. They need both parents, and to have them actively involved with both parents, even though you're divorced, will still give them a well-rounded relationship so that they can deal with normal life when they get out and have their own family.
>
> David D.: When my daughter was born and as she was getting older and older, one thing I was always looking forward to . . . I was always looking forward to her first date. Answering the door when some little snot-nosed kid come to pick her up . . . I missed it . . . I missed it.

Keith M.: One thing I've always looked forward to—my daughter's my only child—is her first day of school. I have never seen her go to school, I've never been involved in her school activities even from preschool.

Jeffrey B.: But the court system's got to weed out instead of just lumping everybody into categories . . . each case is specific. You talk about going to school, my ex-wife knew that I was coming to see my son go to his first day of school, she went a half hour early so I couldn't get a picture of him. That's the kind of crap that goes on all the time. Those are the kind of things that make you angry, you know.

Miller M.: It's very suffering for the children, not just us. We have coping, and we have friends, and we can deal with it. But the children have not such a method to deal with it, they're totally helpless.

V. Conclusion

While startling similarities emerged from the interviews conducted in New York City, Baltimore, and Grand Rapids—especially overwhelming support for the idea of fathers as providers and nurturers—the *differences* among fathers are very important to the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. Frank Furstenberg pointed out how persistent and responsible Arnold and Ricky had been compared to Jordon and Lionnel, who walked away from their parental roles, even though all the young men came from the same neighborhood and same difficult economic circumstances. In Grand Rapids, John D., a young man $600 in arrears on his child support, badly wanted a chance to work and reduce this debt in any way he could, including through community service, while Rick J., who was 37 years old, with one of his children grown and an arrearage of $14,000, doubted that any improvements in the system could affect him. Some of the men who were interviewed would probably continue to try to evade the child support system, and some would take advantage of any opportunities offered by a program like Parents' Fair Share. Although the interviewers did not gather concrete data on job histories and skills, it was also clear that some of the fathers could work at a "family-supporting" wage, while others lacked skills and still others lacked the discipline or interest in sticking with a demanding job.

Parents' Fair Share is a multifaceted intervention that has the potential to respond to noncustodial parents in widely varying circumstances. On the employment side, Parents' Fair Share programs will offer services to upgrade the education and job skills of some participants, and to help others find jobs. On the child support enforcement side, there will be varied responses as well. Procedures will be introduced so that unemployed noncustodial parents who cooperate with the program can have their child support obligations quickly modified to fit their circumstances, enabling them to avoid the accumulation of debt that discourages many from trying to improve their skills and seems to drive some "underground" altogether. But enforcement may be intensified for those who do not cooperate: The special attention given to the Parents' Fair Share caseload in child support programs will, in some cases, speed up the law enforcement process for those who fail to pay according to a legal child support order. The central question for the Parents' Fair Share test is whether, when job training opportunities are added to the enforcement of child support obligations, noncustodial parents work more and pay more child support.

The interviews also make it clear that getting and holding jobs is only one piece of the child support puzzle. To succeed, Parents' Fair Share will have to do more than help unemployed noncustodial parents go to work, the interviews suggest. The deep feelings of love for their children that most of the fathers professed frequently do not translate into financial support; even men who believe in providing for their children do not always come through with money regularly. The reasons they give, and the circumstances they describe, have different details but common themes: (1) Things are temporary—jobs, housing situations, and relationships—even though the fathers often long for stability and permanence in their lives. (2) Men without jobs and money are powerless, especially compared to women, who control children and relationships, and compared to the people and institutions that make and carry out the child support laws and determine who gets jobs. (3) They have too many obligations, often acquired in a state of suspended judgment and hope for permanence, and when they were very young. (4) They are hurt, disappointed, and angry, and they often handle these feelings in self-destructive ways.

The Parents' Fair Share model may begin to address some of the needs underlying these themes through mediation services designed to help noncustodial and custodial parents resolve conflicts and through peer support groups that deal with emotions of fatherhood and include parenting instruction. Parents' Fair Share participants will also be referred to community services for problems such as substance abuse. Neither mediation nor peer support can reverse the deep-seated gender mistrust discussed by Frank Furstenberg or the loneliness and seeming astonishment that some of the men feel when their female partners decide to end relationships. Neither can these services be expected to turn around the behavior of *all* the men who do not pay child support. There are bigger problems—of individual and community models, messages and values, and lack of family-supporting jobs for people without college degrees—than a program like Parents' Fair Share can solve alone.

But the combination of Parents' Fair Share services could improve the circumstances of enough families to make it worthwhile. If Parents' Fair Share can provide training to help men like John D. in Grand Rapids move into occupations that offer them opportunities to earn more and advance, and the program freezes their child support debts while they invest in their futures, there is a chance that the children and mothers who now receive welfare will become independent of public assistance, especially if the mothers get their own job training through the welfare system. In other communities, if Parents' Fair Share succeeds in strengthening child support enforcement to collect from parents like Clark S., who would not pay at all if the system did not keep locating him and intercepting his income and wages through mandatory withholding, some children will have more resources. And if the fathers who want to work, want to pay support, but have differences with the mothers of their children, are helped to deal with these differences in ways that avoid damaging—and even sustain and strengthen—their relationships with their children, Parents' Fair Share may succeed in another way.

The 71 parents who participated in the interviews reported on here also helped pinpoint a crucial change in the existing system for child support that Parents' Fair Share can address: providing accurate, understandable information to parents about child support rights and responsibilities. Very few of the fathers and mothers interviewed had the facts about procedures for establishing legal paternity, setting child support orders, or getting child support obligations modified when their circumstances change. Some did not understand the basic rules of the welfare system; and many would not have been able to explain how the welfare and child support rules interact. This is not surprising; the complexity of the welfare and child support rules often stymie even people who work in these bureaucracies. Nevertheless, if poor parents are expected to cooperate, participate, and respond to programs designed to help them fulfill their obligations, they have to be able to understand those obligations.

This series of interviews was not designed for quantitative data collection and, thus, many questions are left for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration research, including questions about the prevalence of different employment and parenting situations among the noncustodial parents who will enroll, as well as about how the fathers and their children's mothers will respond to Parents' Fair Share. But there is one unexplored area of parents' attitudes and beliefs that stands out because it represents an important gap in our understanding of poor parents' views of child support. The fathers and mothers interviewed for this report were not asked directly how they think their children are faring, where the money comes from if noncustodial parents do not contribute, or who (or what institution) is filling in. It is clear that some of the children are being cared for, and cared for adequately in many cases, in second families or extended families. But it also seems clear that some noncustodial parents do not know, or do not think about, this. To reduce child poverty, it may be critical to learn parents' views of this phenomenon during the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration.

Appendix

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration: An Initiative for Noncustodial Parents of Children Receiving Public Assistance

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The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS) is a challenging new national demonstration project for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of poor children. The project's central goals are:

- To reduce poverty among children receiving public assistance by encouraging and requiring their noncustodial parents to establish paternity and pay child support;
- To increase the employment and earnings of noncustodial parents who are unemployed and unable to adequately support their children; and
- To assist these parents in providing other forms of support to their children when appropriate.

The nine Parents' Fair Share Demonstration programs will utilize a variety of approaches, built around four core services: employment and training, peer support and instruction in parenting skills, mediation, and enhanced child support enforcement. The nine sites in the demonstration are listed at the end of this appendix.

Parents' Fair Share is the product of a unique public/private partnership—the Parents' Fair Share Consortium—that includes the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Labor, the AT&T Foundation, and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nonprofit organization that develops and evaluates programs to help the disadvantaged become more self-sufficient. MDRC is responsible for coordinating the demonstration and for evaluating its success. The other partners set policy and provide overall guidance.

The demonstration was launched in early 1992 with an 18-month to 2-year pilot phase. The demonstration will be extended for several more years if the pilot experience indicates the feasibility and potential value of using a rigorous experimental research design to determine program effectiveness and benefits and costs for the participants and the agencies providing services. If this effort is successful, it will help complete the vision of shared parental responsibility for children at the heart of current national welfare reforms. It will also show policymakers how a broader attack on poverty among children in single-parent families can be mounted by involving both custodial and noncustodial parents.

The Program Model

Parents' Fair Share presents major programmatic challenges. The results from evaluations of previous employment programs that served men have generally been discouraging. In addition, while some researchers have examined the characteristics of noncustodial parents using surveys, ethnographic research, or large national databases, little is known specifically about the noncustodial parents of AFDC children or their likely response to a targeted intervention. Parents' Fair Share is designed to answer these questions.

Given the lack of existing knowledge, demonstration programs are not expected to follow a uniform design. Instead, the Consortium has encouraged states to meet some general requirements, such as the establishment of linkages and cooperation among the agencies involved in Parents' Fair Share (including child support, judicial, welfare, and JTPA employment and training agencies). In addition, programs must provide some level of services in four key areas that MDRC's preliminary research suggested may be important to the success of this initiative: (1) enhanced child support enforcement; (2) employment and training; (3) peer support and instruction in parenting skills; and (4) mediation.

Sites are free to vary the emphasis they place on these components, to add further services, and to design programs that represent a range of possible options. For example, some are "late intervention" programs that work primarily with noncustodial parents who have legally established paternity but are not meeting their child support obligations. These programs typically intervene when a noncustodial parent appears before the courts, either because of failure to pay child support or when an order is established, and informs the judge or hearing officer that he or she cannot pay because he or she is unemployed. Such parents are referred to Parents' Fair Share and required to participate in lieu of legal action. Relatively small-scale programs of this type existed in a few jurisdictions prior to Parents' Fair Share, often initiated by judges who were frustrated by their lack of alternatives in cases where delinquent noncustodial parents claim to be unemployed. Some of these programs have been adapted and are now part of Parents' Fair Share.

The demonstration also includes some "early intervention" programs that recruit noncustodial parents who have not yet established paternity and a support order. These programs are designed to address a major flaw in the current child support enforcement system: the inability to identify noncustodial parents and legally establish paternity in a substantial proportion of public assistance cases. These programs conduct outreach and recruitment in communities and at hospitals, JTPA programs, and even prenatal clinics. Ultimately, establishment of paternity and a support order is necessary in order for parents to participate in the full range of program activities. Some states operate both early and late intervention programs together.

Components of Parents' Fair Share Programs

- **Enhanced child support enforcement**. A primary objective of Parents' Fair Share is to increase support payments made on behalf of children living in single-parent welfare households. The demonstration will not succeed unless increases in participants' earnings are translated into regular child support payments. Although a legal and administrative structure already exists to establish and enforce child support obligations, it may be advantageous for demonstration programs to develop new procedures, services, and incentives in this area. These include steps to expedite the establishment of paternity and child support awards and/or flexible rules that allow child support orders to be reduced while noncustodial parents participate in Parents' Fair Share.
- **Employment and training**. The centerpiece of Parents' Fair Share programs is a group of activities designed to help participants secure long-term, stable employment at a wage level that will allow them to support themselves and their children. Since noncustodial parents vary in their employability levels, sites are strongly encouraged to offer a variety of services, including job search assistance and opportunities for education and skills training. In addition, since it is important to engage participants in income-producing activities quickly to establish the practice of paying child support, sites are required to offer opportunities for on-the-job training.
- **Peer support and instruction in parenting skills**. MDRC's preliminary research suggests that employment and training services, by themselves, will not lead to changed attitudes and regular child support payment patterns for all participants. Education, support, and recognition may be needed as well. Thus, demonstration programs are expected to provide regular support groups for participants. The purpose of this component is to inform participants about their rights and obligations as noncustodial parents, to encourage positive parental behavior and sexual responsibility, to strengthen participants' commitment to work, and to enhance participants' life skills. The groups may also include recreation activities, "mentoring" arrangements using successful Parents' Fair Share graduates, or planned parent-child activities.
- **Mediation.** Often disagreements between custodial and noncustodial parents about visitation, household expenditures, lifestyles, child care, and school arrangements—and the roles and actions of other adults in their children's lives—influence child support payment patterns. Thus, demonstration programs must provide opportunities for parents to mediate their differences using services modeled on those now provided through many family courts in divorce cases.

Policy Background

Parents' Fair Share is designed to address one of the most pressing issues confronting our society: poverty among children in single-parent families. Today, a child born in this country stands a better than 50 percent chance of spending part of his or her life with just one parent, and children living in these families stand an equally great chance of being poor. According to the most recent available data, fewer than half of poor mothers with children by a father living outside the household have a child support order in place, and many of them receive little or no child support. Many of these families receive public assistance through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the nation's largest cash welfare program, which primarily serves single mothers and their children.

In 1988, Congress passed the Family Support Act (FSA), a landmark bill aimed at improving the economic well-being of parents and children receiving AFDC. Central to the act is the idea of "mutual obligation." On the one hand, parents–both mothers and fathers–should be the primary supporters of their children. Thus, parents who receive public assistance have a responsibility to participate in employment services and get jobs, and noncustodial parents have a responsibility to pay child support. On the other hand, government must provide services designed to promote self-sufficiency when individuals are unable to obtain jobs on their own.

To this end, the Family Support Act expands resources and requirements for state programs providing employment and education services to AFDC recipients. Title II of FSA creates the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, the keystone of national policy to help welfare recipients help themselves. At the same time, building on several legislative initiatives of the past decade, Title I of FSA increases the federal role in child support enforcement. The objectives are to improve states' performance in establishing paternity for out-of-wedlock births and to establish and enforce adequate child support orders.

FSA enhancements to the child support enforcement system should improve the collection of child support owed, and thus the standard of living of some poor children. However, given the declining real earnings and labor force participation among low-skilled young males, it is likely that some noncustodial parents who do not pay child support have limited labor market prospects and need employment and training services and other assistance in order to meet their obligations. AFDC children whose noncustodial parents are unable to provide support might remain poor unless additional steps are taken.

Currently, few states are operating programs designed to assist unemployed parents with child support obligations to obtain employment. Although these disadvantaged men may be eligible for programs funded through other sources, such as the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), they are usually not AFDC recipients and are therefore not normally eligible for JOBS programs. In addition, mechanisms do not generally exist to link participation and attendance in employment programs to the child support system. Thus, judges and child support enforcement staff have few options at their disposal when dealing with noncustodial parents who are not complying with child support orders because they are unemployed.

Recognizing these facts, the authors of the Family Support Act included a provision that instructs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to allow a group of states to provide services under the JOBS program to "noncustodial parents who are unemployed and unable to meet their child support obligations." In effect, this section of the act attempts to match the obligation of noncustodial parents to pay child support with the opportunity to obtain gainful employment, much the way JOBS does for custodial parents on AFDC. Parents' Fair Share builds on this provision through additional funding, technical assistance, and the addition of other program components that may be critical for the noncustodial parent population.

Funding

As mentioned above, the Secretary of Health and Human Services allows Parents' Fair Share states to provide services under the JOBS program to unemployed noncustodial parents whose children receive AFDC. Participating states also receive funding from the demonstration partners and are expected to contribute state or local funding to the project. Funds generated from state sources (as well as those provided by the demonstration funding Consortium) are generally matchable by the federal government. States are encouraged to use other funds as well, including Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Food Stamp Work and Training, and education funds. MDRC's research activities are supported by foundation funds.

Objectives of the Parents' Fair Share Consortium

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration is a rare opportunity to advance the nation's social agenda on a number of fronts. The Consortium members have designed a unique vehicle to simultaneously increase our knowledge about effective programs for disadvantaged men, about the impacts that investments in their "human capital" will have on child support payments and the well-being of their children, and about changes that can be made to strengthen child support enforcement. Employment and training and other services for noncustodial parents, coupled with similar services for custodial parents and child support enforcement efforts, could create a multi-pronged strategy to address one of our most challenging social problems: poverty among children in single-parent families.

The Parents' Fair Share Consortium

The Pew Charitable Trusts
The Ford Foundation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Labor
AT&T Foundation
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

The Research Effort

MDRC is conducting a multifaceted evaluation of programs in the demonstration. The research begins during the pilot phase with a study of the implementation and early operation of the programs. This analysis focuses on the administrative feasibility of operating these programs, the characteristics of the noncustodial parents they serve, the kinds of services participants receive, and their labor market experiences and child support payment records.

During the pilot phase, MDRC will also assess the feasibility of extending the demonstration into a full-scale evaluation that will test the effects, or *impacts*, of some or all of the pilot programs. The decision about whether to proceed beyond the pilot phase will depend on the ability of the pilot sites to recruit and retain eligible noncustodial parents, deliver the required services, place clients into stable jobs, and translate their earnings into child support payments. If at least three to five of the pilot sites are able to operate successful programs at the scale required to support an impact test, MDRC will recommend to the Consortium that the project be continued. The second phase would begin in early 1994. If a decision is made to proceed, eligible noncustodial parents will be assigned, at random, to one of two groups: a *program group* that is given access to the program's services or a *control group* that will not receive those services. Members of the control group will be free to seek out other services in their communities on their own initiative. Researchers will compare the labor market and child support payment experiences of these two groups of noncustodial parents—and the associated custodial parents and children—during a follow-up period. Any differences that are measured between the two groups will be attributable to the Parents' Fair Share program.

Pilot Sites in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

Mobile County Parents' Fair Share Project
Mobile County Department of Human Resources
Mobile, Alabama

Duval County Parents' Fair Share Project
Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services
Jacksonville, Florida

MassJOBS Parents' Fair Share Project
Springfield Employment Resource Center, Inc.
Springfield, Massachusetts

Kent County Parents' Fair Share Project
Kent County Friend of the Court
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Minnesota Parents' Fair Share Program
Anoka County Job Training Center
Blaine, Minnesota
Dakota County Department of Employment
and Economic Assistance
West St. Paul, Minnesota

FUTURES Connection
Kansas City, Missouri

Operation Fatherhood
Union Industrial Home for Children
Trenton, New Jersey

Ohio Options for Parental Training and Support
Butler County Department of Human Services
Hamilton, Ohio
Montgomery County Department of Human Services
Dayton, Ohio

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Memphis, Tennessee

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